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**THE IMPLICATIONS OF PERSISTENCE THEORY
ON NEW STUDENT ORIENTATIONS
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

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**THE IMPLICATIONS OF PERSISTENCE THEORY
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IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

by

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my parents, Chief Warrant Officer Harold Rawlins McGilvray, a junior college graduate, and Neta Nell McGilvray, who taught me that hard work was the key to achieving my goals and the value of education. They gave me the dream.

And to my soul mate, Lynn Persyn, who provided her unwavering support and unconditional love. Without her I would not have fulfilled the lifelong dream of earning a Ph.D.

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No work is ever the sole accomplishment of a sole individual and that is especially true in this case. This dissertation is the result of the professionalism, hard work and caring of many people. I wish to acknowledge the contributions of some of those people.

The staff and faculty of the Community College Leadership Program have created an environment that promotes student success. The faculty, Dr. Roueche, Dr. Moore and the late Dr. Phelps, have built a great program that inspires excellence. The program and my successful completion of it would have not been possible without the help and hard work of Ruth Thompson and Reid Watson. The superb learning experience of NISOD headed by Dr Perez-Green along with the great help she has been in my completion of this program.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF PERSISTENCE THEORY
ON NEW STUDENT ORIENTATIONS
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Community colleges, with their “open door” admissions policy, provide higher education opportunities for both traditional and at-risk students. However, the conditions that define “at-risk” make a high percentage of community college students vulnerable to attrition, increasing the need for effective retention efforts. The question of the applicability of existing persistence theories to community college populations and the theory implications for the design of new student orientation programs in community colleges are the underlying issues of this study.

This qualitative study utilizes literature review, individual interviews, group interviews, and a document review for data collection to examine the perspectives of four sources on new student orientation programs in a community college. The perspectives examined were: (1) retention theory as found in the literature, (2) community college

students, (3) community college administrators and (4) the documentation of the college's orientation program. The correspondence between these four perspectives was then examined in a pair-wise comparison.

The study found that the students' perceptions of their college experience and the persistence issues they confronted were in agreement with that indicated by the literature. Further, that the administrators were generally aware of the content of retention theory, however, the design of the existing orientation program did not make full use of the implications of persistence theory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	
Background and Overview of the Study	1
Scope of the Problem	4
Statement of the Problem	10
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Significance of the Study	13
Definitions of Terms	13
Assumptions and Limitations	15
Chapter Summary	16
CHAPTER TWO	
Overview	17
Persistence Theories	17
Spady's Attrition Model 1970	18
Spady's Attrition Model 1971	19
Tinto's Attrition Model 1975	20
Tinto's Attrition Model 1993 Revision	21
Pascarella's Attrition Model 1980	23
Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model 1985	24
Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model 2000	27
Primary Foci of the Theories	28
Other Research on Attrition and Retention	30
Summary of Attrition Theory Elements	34
Persistence Theory Factors that can be Addressed in New Student Orientations	35
Current Practice in the Literature	36
Areas for Research	42
Conclusion	43
CHAPTER THREE	
Overview	45
Methodology	46
Chapter Summary	56

CHAPTER FOUR

Overview	57
Organization of the Findings	58
Findings	64
Research Question 1 - The Literature Perspective	64
Research Question 4 – Key Issues from the Documentation	67
Institutional Effectiveness	67
Funding	68
Human Resources	68
Facilities	68
Past Orientation Program	69
On-Line Orientation Program	72
Student Activities	78
Registration Period	80
Observation	80
Research Question 2 - The Student Perspective	81
Why Students Say They Start College	82
High School’s Relevance to Community College Students	94
Age – The Issue That Is Not an Issue	104
Other Concerns and Fears of New Students	111
College vs. Work and Children	120
Student Activities	131
Real College	141
Instructors – A Key	145
Advising – Another Key	162
Developmental Classes	165
Why Students Say They Stay	168
Clueless, In and About College	176
Orientation Program Suggestions from Students	177
Unintended advice from Students to Administrators	190
Concluding Comment: One to Remember	192
Research Question 3 - The Administrators’ Perspective	192
What is the purpose of student orientation?	193
How are new students are oriented?	199
How well is orientation done?	205
How can retention best be facilitated?	210
Registration’s Direct Effects	221
Mandatory or Voluntary Orientation	222
Student Expectations	224
Study Skills	227

Developmental Course Students	230
Goal Orientation	233
“Real College”	235
Student Interaction	236
Campus Activities	237
Priorities and Culture – The Key	244
CHAPTER 5	
Overview	251
Analysis	252
Research Question 1 - The Literature Perspective	252
Research Question 2 - The Student Perspective	253
Why Students Say They Start College	253
High School’s Relevance to Community College Students	256
Age – The Issue That Is Not an Issue	259
Other Concerns and Fears of New Students	260
College vs. Work and Children	262
Student Activities	265
I Want to Go to A Real College	267
Instructors – A Key	269
Advising – Another Key	272
Developmental Classes	273
Why Students Say They Stay	274
Student Suggestions on Retention	275
Clueless, In and About College	276
Orientation Suggestions from Students	276
Unintended advice from Students to Administrators	280
Concluding Comment: One to Remember	280
New Vs. Experienced Students	281
Research Question 3 - The Administrators’ Perspective	282
What is the purpose of student orientation?	282
How do you orient students?	283
How well does your orientation meet the purpose and goals?	286
How retention can best be facilitated ?	287
Student issues and concerns	290
Research Question 4 – Key Issues from the Documentation	296
Research Question 5 – Correspondence of the Perspectives	298
Summary	302
Recommendations	307
Recommendations for Future Research	309
Conclusion	310

APPENDIX A - Theory Implications for Orientations	314
APPENDIX B - Questions for New Students	315
APPENDIX C - Questions for Experienced Students	317
APPENDIX D - Questions for Administrators	319
APPENDIX E - Student Issues to Address with Administrators	320
APPENDIX F - Specific Documentation Issues	322
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 324
 VITA	 334

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Population Trends by Ethnicity, 1998 – 2050

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Model of Study

Figure 2.1: Spady's Attrition Model 1970

Figure 2.2: Spady's Attrition Model 1971

Figure 2.3: Tinto's Attrition Model 1975

Figure 2.4: Tinto's Attrition Model 1993

Figure 2.5: Pascarella's Attrition Model 1980

Figure 2.6: Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model for Non-traditional Students 1985

Figure 2.7: Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model of Student Retention 2000

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model of Study

Figure 5.1: Summary of Correspondence Between the Literature, Student Perceptions,
Administrator Perceptions and Orientation Programs

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

For every two students who enter a community college this year, only one will accomplish his or her educational goal; the other one will drop out. That is an approximate representation of the attrition rates for community colleges. Summers (2003) reports in an ERIC Review that research found "...that only 45 percent of community college first-time, full time freshmen who intended to earn a degree or certificate graduated in the period 1998 – 2001" (p 65). Further, 32 percent of that population neither returned to the community college nor enrolled at another higher education institution for the students' second year (Summers, 2003). One-third of the students drop out before the second semester. Student attrition is a problem of significant proportions with significant ramifications

Retention of first year students in colleges and universities has been a constant problem over a long period. However, the proportion of freshman who leave college before becoming sophomores has reached a record high, according to a report by the American College Testing Program" (Geraghty, 1996). At community colleges, this is especially true with open door admissions and the resulting large population of non-traditional, first generation college attendees, at-risk and under-prepared students that are the rule at community colleges (Foner, 2003; Roueche and Baker, 1987; Roueche and

Roueche, 1992, 1999). This at-risk population is comprised of a wide range of ages, backgrounds, academic preparedness and ethnicities, although "... a disproportionate percentage of these students were minorities, especially in urban areas" (Roueche and Roueche, 1993, p 37). The characteristics of at-risk or high-risk students include "weak self-concepts, a history of academic failure, uncertain or unrealistic academic goals, and family and economic difficulties." These characteristics pose significant problems with persistence (Roueche and Roueche, 1993, p 37). For these reasons, investigation of programs to retain students is critical to community colleges and to the communities and individuals served by those colleges.

Student retention is a major indicator of student success and persistence theories suggest approaches, which have proven successful in some studies. However, the literature indicates that student orientation programs receive significantly more emphasis at major four-year universities than they do at community colleges. Given that community colleges have large numbers of first generation college students and other at-risk students, more emphasis should be placed on orientation programs to ease these students into the college environment and improve their persistence.

Given the apparent importance of student retention, it is appropriate to review the literature on student retention and on persistence theories to see if orientation programs have utility as potential tools to improve new student retention in community colleges.

The Importance of Retention in Community Colleges

Historically, community colleges are the providers of education and training for both the business community and to the at risk student, providing open access to

education for many of those groups for which there are no alternative avenues to an education (Roueche and Baker 1987; Roueche, Ely and Roueche 2001; Bryant 2001).

“Poverty and undereducation are inextricably linked to each other as well as to decaying neighborhoods, crime unemployment, welfare ...” (Roueche and Roueche 1999 p. 4) and the social consequences of failing to educate the community college student are enormous. In a report on the socioeconomic benefits generated by community colleges in Texas, higher student earnings were estimated at \$1,196.9 millions. The same report also estimated social savings (costs that are health related; crime related and welfare and unemployment payments) of \$276.3 million per year in Texas (Christophersen and Robison 2002).

In addition, the impact on economic development cannot be ignored. As the traditional labor market shrinks, employers need to recruit workers “...from the ranks of those whose development has traditionally been neglected – minorities, women and older workers” (Roueche and Roueche, 1993, p 12).

Further, Levitz, Noel and Richter (Gaither, Ed. 1999) argue that failure in retention also has negative consequences for the institution, both in image and financial impact. They contend that attrition is the result of a failure of the institution to meet the needs of the student and the “unhappy student” may negatively influence others concerning their educational choices. In addition, Levitz, Noel and Richter (Gaither, Ed. 1999) argue that attrition during the first term or year results in a loss of revenue from future tuition. They go so far as to estimate that loss through a formula and state “...that even most modest reduction in attrition rate of 10 percent, meaning a reduction in

attrition from 30 percent to 27 percent, would result in savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars even at a very small institution.” (Gaither, Ed., 1999, p. 32) Given the current national trend to reduce state funding of higher education (Ehrenberg 2000; Brownstein 2001), the loss of income takes on significant meaning to the fiscal well being of a community college.

Clearly, attrition has major implications for the country’s economic development and for the welfare of society. The scope of the problem is amplified when the high attrition rates are considered.

It is clear that community colleges must reduce attrition, i.e. increase retention, and promote student persistence. As a title line for an article in The Times Higher Education Supplement stated in the headline reporting on an English retention study, “Dropout Rate is in Hands of Colleges” (Tysome, 2002, p. 3). Orientation programs have significant effects on the adjustment of new students to the college culture and requirements, (Tinto 1993) and improvements in these programs may be effective in increasing retention.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Academically Under Prepared Students

The extensive problem of under-prepared students entering community colleges is well documented by many authors, among them are Roueche and Roueche (1993, 1999), (Hoyt 1999; Grimes 1997; Kerka 1988; Peterman 2000). Sources describe the problem in terms of the depth of the lack of preparation and the wide scope of the problem with

estimates of 50% and more of students entering community colleges requiring remediation.

Even in secondary schools with diverse student bodies, a recent study found that minority students who attend schools with predominately minority student bodies receive an inferior education compared to minority students attending predominately white schools (Jefferson and Hughes, 2003). No literature was found that indicates that academic preparedness is not a major problem in retention.

Changing Demographics

Although the growth in the aggregate U.S. population is likely to increase at a rate slightly below the historical ten percent per decade from 2000 through 2050, the unique aspect of the population change is in the sources of the growth (Gaither, 1999; McCabe, 2000; McManus, 1999). This will significantly shift the demographic make-up of the country, and consequently the population that community colleges serve. In general, there will be a decrease in the White population as a percentage of the total population, while there will be a growth in Asian, Black and Hispanic populations, also as a percentage of the population. Further, there will be an infusion of many ethnicities and religions. This will result largely from two factors; a large immigration from 'non-white' countries and differences in birth rates within the ethnic groupings. The change in demographics by ethnicity has begun and is forecasted to produce radical change by the year 2050, as shown below.

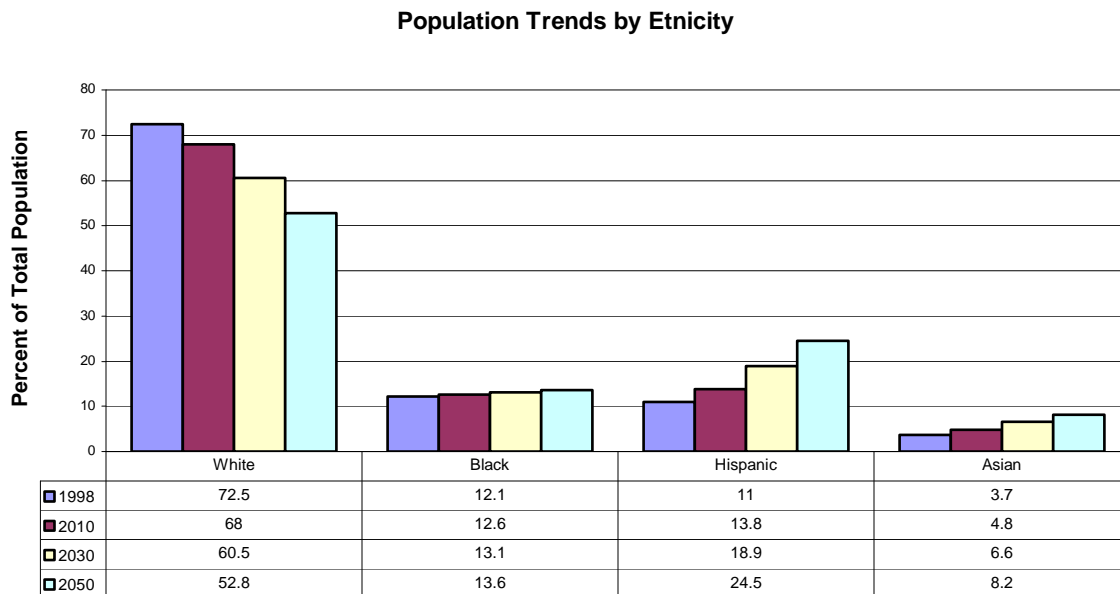


Figure 1.1: Population Trends by Ethnicity, 1998 – 2050

U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999; Constructed from data, McCabe, Robert H., 2000, p 9.

As the percentage of the White population decreases by almost twenty percentage points, the nation will see minority ethnic groups increase in both their absolute numbers and as percentages of the total population. When expressed as percentages of growth by ethnicity, these changes are remarkable with Black growth at 63.33 percent and Hispanics growth at 326.4 percent with other ethnic groups, such as American Indian and Asian, also growing by significant percentages. In the cases of the Hispanic and Asian populations especially, these figures reflect changes in immigration trends. Projections are that 55 percent of the net growth in the U.S. population will be from immigrants and their descendants. Further, the ‘country of origin’ for many immigrants has changed significantly. While in the past most immigrants were from Europe, since the 1980s,

immigrants have come largely from Hispanic and Asian countries (Gaither, 1999). These demographic changes will also increase religious diversity.

Segregation of Ethnic Groups

“Diversity (and here we only mean color) depends on where you live. In the suburbs, it’s very white; in the inner city, it’s very black. There are whole states that are not very diverse; Almost 92 percent of school-aged people in Idaho are white, which pales compared to Vermont where 99 percent are white.” (Schuman & Olufs, 1995, p. 8). Both the segregation of neighborhoods (Krysan, 2002; Galster, et al, 2003; Charles, 2000; Downey, 2003) and the re-segregation of secondary schools (Orfield, 2003; Nation’s Public Schools Have Become Resegregated, 2003; It’s getting worse again, 2003; Richard, 2002) are widely documented by both research and general publications. The *US News and World Reports* states that seventy percent of Afro-American students attend predominately minority schools (2002). Further, the literature widely discusses the “re-segregation” of public schools beginning in the early 1980s. From these segregated neighborhoods, both for long time residents of the US and for immigrants, students will come to the community college. At the college they enter a new, ‘foreign’ culture with many ethnic groups, both student and faculty, and the student is not only expected to participate openly and freely in classroom discussions, but to work effectively on group projects. This is a major change to accomplish with out any positive prior knowledge of the other race or ethnicity.

The true complexity of the issue of diverse student populations is illustrated in 2002 at LaGuardia Community College in New York City with a student body that is 66

percent foreign born, 49 percent have been in the U.S. for less than five years, speak a total of 108 different languages with more than 50 percent with English not their native language. Further, the student body is largely poor and working class with 64 percent having less than \$25,000 in household income per year (Mellow, et al 2003).

Family and Work Related Implications

Many community college students have families for which the student must provide financial support. Unfortunately, families are not always supportive of the community college student. This is especially true for first generation college students and in some cultures. Further, family and work obligations impact time available to study or to gain rest necessary to study effectively. These obligations also impact the students' ability and disposition to be integrated into the college through activities at the institution with peers and faculty. (Licklieder 1993; Roueche & Baker 1987; Roueche & Roueche 1993, 1999). The negative impact of the number of hours worked was documented as early as 1975 (Astin, 1975).

Summary – Scope of the Problem

"Based on U.S. Census Bureau data, by the year 2015, minority enrollments in community colleges are projected to increase by approximately 12 percent, while the white student population is projected to decrease by approximately eight percent. Overall, 46 percent of all African American students, 55 percent of all Hispanic students, 55 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 55 percent of all Native American students in

higher education attend community colleges (NCESS). In addition, more than half of community college student are first-generation students" (Thomas 2002, p 74-75).

As stated by Roueche and Roueche in 1993, "The stark realities of changing demographics, the demands of a burgeoning technology, and a faltering public education system have America caught somewhere between a rock and a hard place" (p 1). It is not getting any easier for community colleges to retain students, especially those who are at risk. But educating the most deficient students and preparing them for employment and personal advancement (McCabe, 2000, p 7) is a major role of community colleges. Further, one of the foundations of community colleges is "the conviction that higher education is the right of anyone who could profit from it" (Roueche and Roueche, 1993, p 25), and as stated by McCabe (2000), we have no one to waste. Retention will be a major focus of community colleges if they are to achieve their mission and that requires new approaches by the colleges.

Orientation Programs in Practice and Persistence

Orientation programs and seminars have significant effects on the adjustment of new students to the college culture and requirements, and in doing so these programs affect the heart of academic affairs responsibilities – the quality of education of the students as a result of the student's relationship with the institutional culture and with the faculty (Tinto 1993). Examples of current practice of new student orientation programs as found in the literature are described in Chapter 2, Literature Review, of this study.

The greatest volume of the literature is based on four-year institutions, not on community college orientation programs. And although some of the activities are those to be expected using persistence theories, no references to using persistence theories were found in the design of programs.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Community colleges are the colleges of the “open door,” and they provide the opportunity for higher education not only to traditional students but also to a large percentage of at-risk students. However, the very conditions that define “at-risk” make these students vulnerable to attrition. Therefore, the high attrition rates in community colleges are not a great surprise. But when the high attrition rates are considered in light of the community college’s mission to provide higher education to all who may benefit from it, including those with no other opportunity to gain higher education, then the criticality of taking every opportunity to facilitate student retention gains significance.

The issue revolves around several related questions: Do community college administrators and students perceive that new student orientation programs as tools to facilitate student retention? Are new student orientation programs utilized by community colleges to promote retention? And do they utilize them effectively, employing the applicable factors from persistence theories to design their program?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of college administrators and students at three community colleges relevant to the new student orientation program at each college, and further, to examine through a document review, the support given to these programs by the colleges. Underlying this study is the investigation of the utilization of persistence theory for the design of new student orientation programs.

It is intuitive that new student orientation programs are intended to improve the performance of students but there is no link to the design of orientations based on persistence theories. However, there are studies of the validity of persistence theories, particularly Tinto's theory, which would validate such an approach. This study is based on the concept that the students' needs and the aspects of persistence theory that can practically be incorporated into orientation programs should inform the design of new student orientations. To facilitate the understanding of the remainder of this chapter, a conceptual model of the study is at Figure 1.2, below. This model represents the data collection points with circles and the comparisons with arrows.

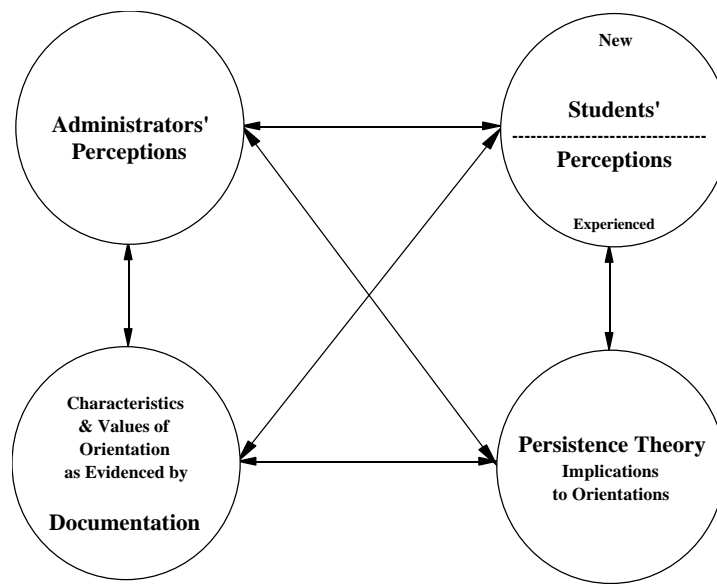


Figure 1.2: Conceptual Model of Study

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of persistence theory literature for student orientation programs?
2. What are the expressed issues and needs of new community college students, and to what extent can student orientation programs meet those needs?
3. What are the community college administrators' perceptions of the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs?
4. What are the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs as evidenced by program documentation?
5. What is the correspondence among administrators' perceptions of orientation programs, the characteristics of the programs themselves, research implications for orientations, and the expressed issues and needs of students?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is the foundation for future research aimed at determining the effectiveness of student orientation programs in student persistence and to the eventual design of a model or models for such programs.

The study forms the first step of that process by determining, in a limited scope, the current perceptions about student orientations. This is done on four dimensions:

1. Perceptions of the college administrators who design, resource and execute new student orientation programs;
2. Perceptions of students who have persisted beyond the first year of studies at the college.
3. The perception of the importance the college places on new student orientation programs as evidenced by documentation relating to the program. Specifically addressed are policies, curriculum, and resources, both financial and personnel involved in the program.
4. This data will be examined as it relates to the functions and elements of current persistence theories that are addressable in new student orientation programs.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Freshmen Orientation Programs – Any program that fulfills the mission as specified by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS):

The mission of student orientation must be to provide for continuing services and assistance that will: aid new students in

their transition to the institution; expose new students to the broad educational opportunities of the institution; and integrate new students into the life of the institution. Essential components of an orientation program must include: an introduction to both the academic and student life aspects of the institution and structured opportunities for the interaction of new students with faculty, staff, and continuing students. (Greenlaw, Anliker & Barker 1997, p. 306)

For this study, “*orientation programs*” encompassed not just a specific event of orientation but all programs directed at new students that could facilitate their acclimation to college.

Drop out - a decision made by a student to leave the school in which they are currently enrolled.

Non-traditional student – a student in higher education that is over the age of 24, not a resident of the college, attends college part time, or some combination of the three (Bean and Metzner, 1985).

Persistence – Student persistence is a measurable individual performance indicator. It is whether a student persists to the accomplishment of his or her stated educational goals. Persistence is an indicator of student satisfaction and success. Measurement requires that institutions collect data on student goals (Gaither, (Ed.) 1999).

Retention – Retention is “...the percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen who return to the same institution for the second term or second year of study.” Retention is a

measurable institutional performance indicator of student satisfaction and success.

(Gaither, (Ed.) 1999, pgs. 31-32)

Attrition – Attrition is the opposite of retention, i.e. the dropout of students from an institution.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study is predicated on several underlying assumptions. These are that: student orientation programs can be effective to some degree in improving student persistence at community colleges, new student orientations programs need improvement in their effectiveness in student persistence, persistence theories have some applicability to the community college environment, and there are aspects of student orientation programs that are effective in promoting student retention as an indicator of student success and further, that these aspects can be identified. The other major assumption is that the literature on orientation programs as utilized at four year institutions is also relevant, at least in part, to community colleges. However, the writer acknowledges the danger associated with this second assumption in relation to retention of at-risk students, which was clearly illustrated in the article *Is All Retention Good? An Empirical Study*:

...attrition within a University can be good. A University does not want to retain students who are not academically suited for their environment. This certainly will have severe repercussions for the image of the University if these below average students graduate with the

University's diploma and enter into the work force.

(Rummel, Acton, Costello, Pielow, 1999).

Thirdly, that the intent of community colleges is to retain as many students as possible, providing all possible assistance to the students until they achieve their academic goal. That this is a widely accepted precept in community colleges is acknowledged even in the adamant argument by a community college professor against the emphasis on retaining every student possible (Mahon, 2003).

Limitations of this study are primarily in the scope in it that it is conducted with students and administrators at one college. The small sample and limited time in the field limit the depth and breath of the study and preclude generalizations of the findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this study the author will investigate the use of persistence theory in the design of community college new student orientation programs by looking at the perceptions of college administrators and students as those perceptions relate to the orientation programs and by examining the documented support provided to these programs. This information will be analyzed considering the implications of persistence theories as posited by several theorists.

Chapter One has stressed the importance of maximizing the effectiveness of new student orientation programs at community colleges given that community colleges are the open door institutions for higher education for the at-risk student and the forecasted growth of this student population.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OVERVIEW

Chapter One summarized the growing importance of improving retention in community colleges and introduced persistence theory as a possible tool in designing better orientation programs to facilitate that effort. The review of the literature in this chapter focuses on two major areas. First, there are descriptions of several persistence theories, which are prominent in the literature, as they have evolved over the last thirty-three years. The foci of these models are then discussed followed by an enumeration of recurring aspects of these theories that may be suitable for addressing in new student orientation programs. Secondly, a brief summary of current orientation practices, as described in the literature, is provided.

PERSISTENCE THEORIES

Several researchers have developed theoretical models of student attrition to identify and analyze the multitude of variables that influence each student's decision to persist in college or to drop out. The variables are complex and many of them are beyond the control, or even the influence, of the college. However, the most prominent theories include variables that are either controlled or influenced by each community college and a review and an analysis of these theories is valuable to determine what community colleges can do to affect attrition.

Spady's Attrition Model 1970

Spady's attrition model is one of the earliest to address student retention. Spady's work (1970, 1971) drew on the work of Durkheim (1951) on suicide for application in his student attrition model. Durkheim (1951) stated that suicidal tendencies increased for persons who were not integrated into their social system, either socially or normatively. Spady (1970) drew a parallel process for students who dropped out of college (Summers, 2003). "Students who did not share similar values and orientations similar to other students, did not interact socially with other students, and generally did not feel compatible with the social system of college were more likely to drop out" (Summers, 2003, p 66).

Spady's (1970) first model included five independent variables: grade performance, intellectual development, normative congruence, friendship support and social integration. He postulated that the fifth, social integration, was influenced by the other four independent variables. These five independent variables were linked through two other variables, satisfaction and institutional commitment, to the dependent variable, drop out decision (Spady, 1970; DeRemers, 2003; Summers, 2003)

This model "implies a time sequence and depicts the assumed direct causal connections between pairs of variables" (Spady, 1970, p 78). The variable "normative congruence" is critical in this model. As defined by Spady (1970), "It represents not only all of the student goals, orientations, interests, and personality dispositions ...but the consequences of the interaction between these attributes and various subsystems of the college environment as well." (p 78)

It is relevant to note that Spady's model does not consider chance variables and the research in support of the model is done in four-year universities, with student bodies that are not congruent with community college student characteristics.

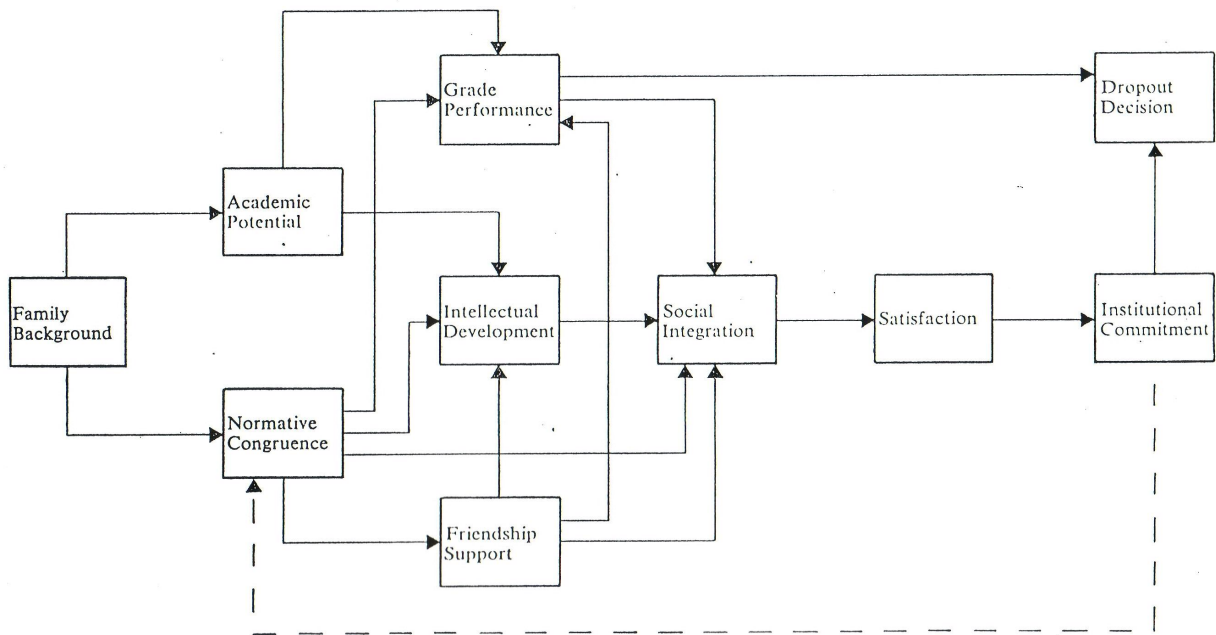


Figure 2.1: Spady's Attrition Model 1970 (Spady, 1970, p 79)

Spady's Attrition Model 1971

Spady (1971) published the results of a longitudinal study conducted on 683 first-year undergraduate students at the University of Chicago. This study was conducted using his original model (1970) with the intent of employing his model to analyze the separate components and interrelationships effect on student attrition. Spady then modified his original model to include a separate component of consisting of structural

relations and friendship support. A further improvement over the original model was a revision of the relationships between the components (Summers, 2003). See Figure 2.2.

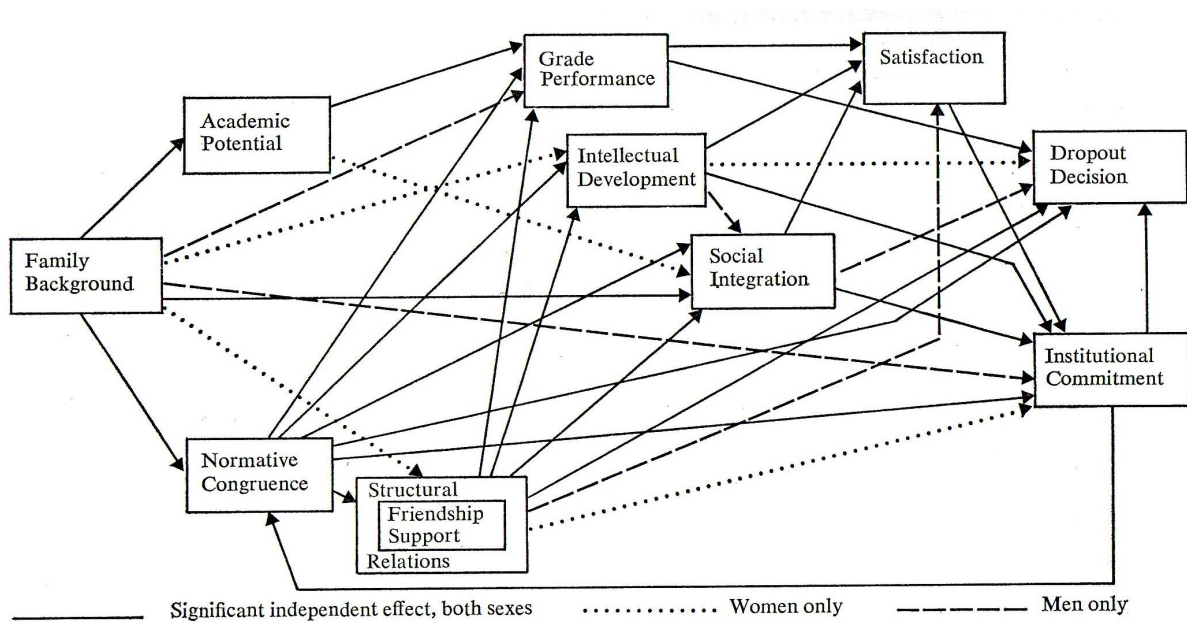


Figure 2.2: Spady's Attrition Model 1971 (Spady, 1971, p 79)

Tinto's Attrition Model 1975

The next major model on student attrition was Tinto's (1973), who, like Spady, drew on the work of Durkheim (1951). Tinto's model postulates that a student enters college with a set of "pre-entry attributes" which produce an initial set of "goals and commitments." Tinto argues that the student's experiences after he enters college, "primarily those arising out of interactions between the individual and other members of the college," (Tinto, 1973, p 114) either result in academic and social integration, or a failure to integrate into the college environment. This integration directly affects the student's intentions, their goals, and their commitment to the institution. These are

impacted by outside commitments and result in the student's "departure decision." (See Figure 2.3) Tinto states that, "Interactive experiences which further one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social life of the college are seen to enhance the likelihood that the individual will persist within the institution until degree completion." (Tinto, 1973, p 115). Tinto has since revised his model.

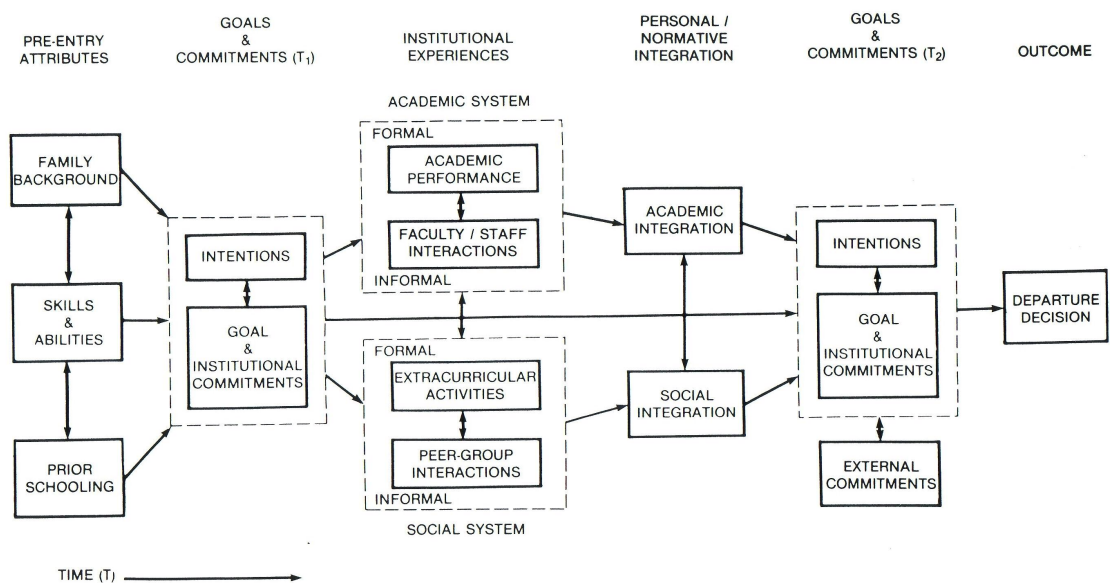


Figure 2.3: Tinto's Attrition Model 1975 (Tinto, 1975, p 114)

Tinto's Attrition Model 1993 Revision

Tinto modified his attrition model in 1993 based on his continued work and the results of studies done by many researchers on "the most widely recognized and tested model" (Summers, 2003, p 66). Tinto's modifications were to add the direct influence on the initial student intentions and their goal and institutional commitment by external forces (commitments) of the student. Further, Tinto postulates that the community

external to the college, to the degree the student participates in it, indirectly impacts the student's social and academic integration or directly influences the student through external commitments. (See Figure 2.4)

Tinto states that that "When those external communities are strong, as they are for commuting students, their actions may serve to condition, if not counter, events within the college" (Tinto, 1993, p 116). For all but the few community colleges that have large housing facilities, this represents a special problem, given the great numbers of commuting students, full time employed students, and students with dependent families.

Also relevant is Tinto's statement, "the model posits that, other things being equal, the lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p 116).

Given the external commitments of community college students and the importance of student integration into the social and academic communities of the college, Tinto's model indicates that community colleges must directly address these two issues.

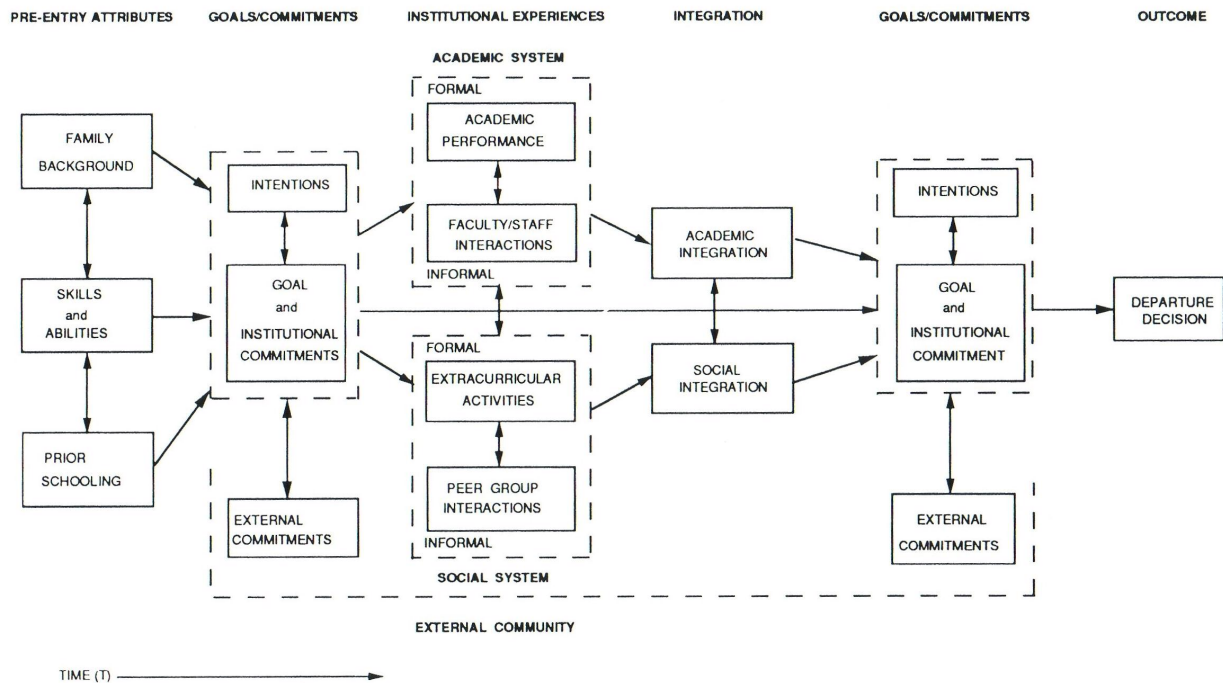


Figure 2.4: Tinto's Attrition Model 1993
(Tinto, 1993, p 114)

Pascarella's Attrition Model 1980

Building on the work of both Spady and Tinto, Pascarella (1980) proposed a model that elevates the importance of informal contact between the student and faculty based on his work with Terenzini (Pascarella, 1980; DeRemers, 2003). Pascarella posits that the persistence or dropout decision is directly related to educational outcomes, which has been influenced by the other four elements of the model; student background characteristics, institutional factors, informal contact with faculty, and other college experiences. There is an interactive relationship between student background characteristics and institutional factors. There is also an interactive relationship between informal contact with faculty and other college experiences. These two model elements

not only have an interactive relationship with each other but with educational outcomes, the factor with a direct relationship with the decision to persist or dropout. In Pascarella's model, the most critical elements are informal contact with faculty and other college experiences, with the stress on the importance with informal contact with the faculty (Pascarella, 1980; DeRemers, 2003).

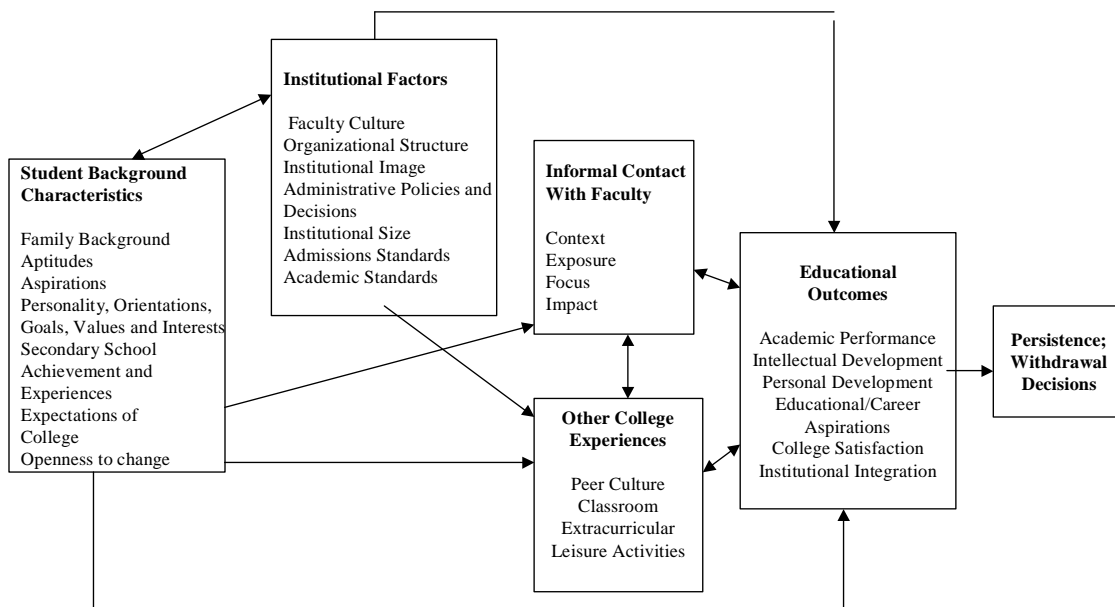


Figure 2.5: Pascarella's Attrition Model 1980

Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model for Non-traditional Students 1985

Bean and Metzner's Model was the first theoretical model to specifically addresses the non-traditional student experience in higher education (Bean and Metzner, 1985). They contended that the other theoretical models relied on social integration into the college community and since most non-traditional students were not often socially integrated into the college, another model was needed (Summers, 2003). Since the vast

majority of community college students are nontraditional under Bean and Metzner's definition, this model is relevant to this study.

Bean and Metzner explain that the elements that comprise this model resulted from a thorough review of the literature on nontraditional students and that the linkages between elements were derived from other models of traditional student attrition and behavioral theories (Summers, 2003). Bean and Metzner postulate that the dropout decision for non-traditional students is based on four sets of variables: background and defining (primarily high school performance), academic performance (measured by grade point average), the intent to leave (influenced primarily by psychological outcomes and academic variables), and environmental variables, which include commuting, family, and employment. These environmental variables are expected to have a major impact on the decision to dropout (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Summers, 2003; DeRemers, 2003).

There are two critical compensatory interaction effects in this model (Summers, 2003; Bean and Metzner, 2005). First, the interaction between "academic" and "environmental" variables: in this interaction the environmental variables are the most significant. Positive environmental variables can result in a student with low values in academic variables to persist. The converse is also true. Negative environmental variables can result in a student with high positive academic variables dropping out of college. Second, there is the compensatory interaction between "academic outcomes" and "psychological outcomes." In this relationship, the psychological outcomes predominate: positive psychological outcomes can result in a student with negative academic outcomes persisting and, conversely, negative psychological outcomes can

influence a student with positive academic outcomes to dropout. (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Summers, 2003

Bean and Metzner assume that the nontraditional student will not be socially integrated into the college community; they do not address whether a nontraditional student can or should be socially integrated.

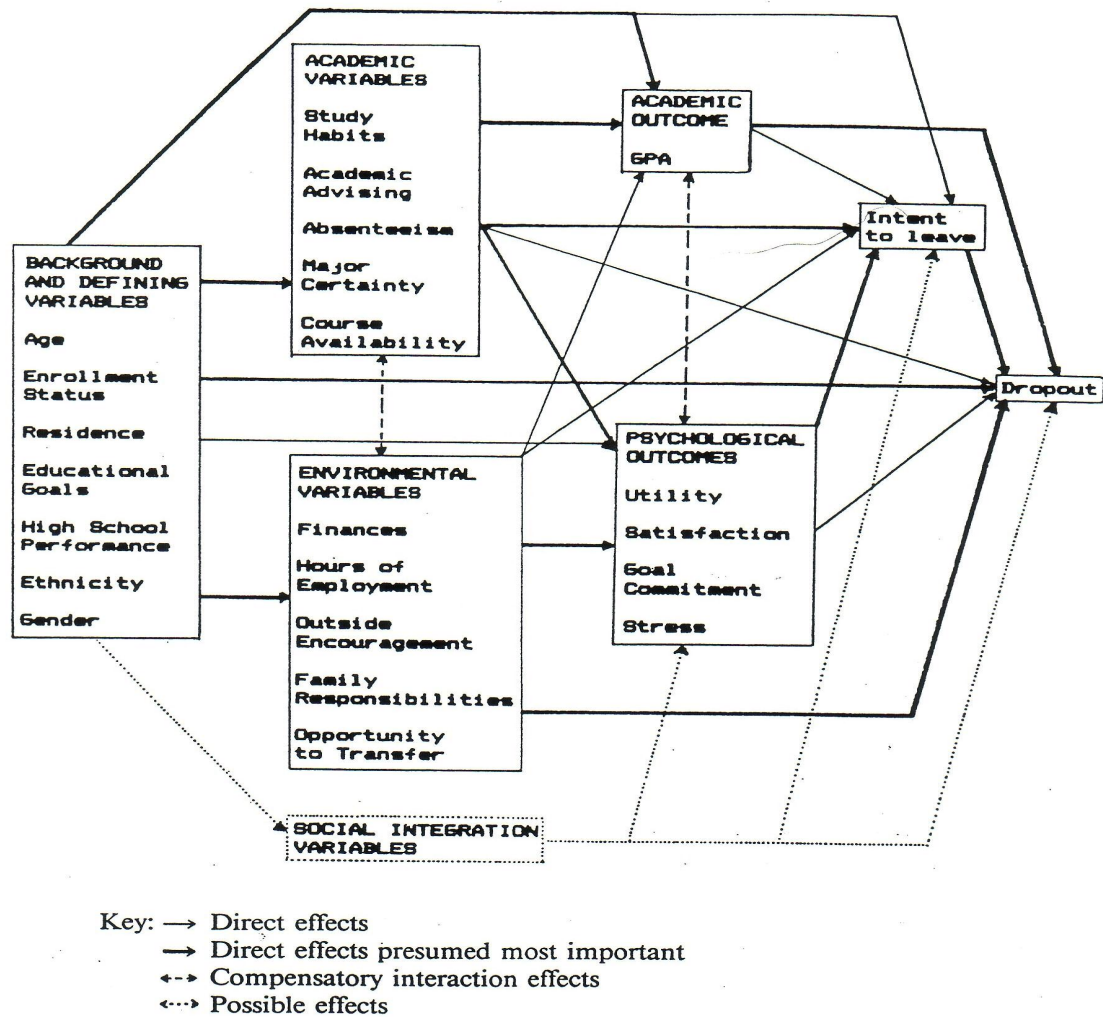


Figure 2.6: Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model for Non-traditional Students 1985
(Bean and Metzner, 1985, p 491)

Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model of Student Retention (2000)

Bean and Eaton's (Braxton, Ed., 2000) Psychological Model of Student Retention is the newest of the models dealing with student retention. Whereas Tinto's (1993) model emphasizes the difference between voluntary and involuntary withdrawal from college, Bean and Eaton (2000) argue for inclusion of the involuntarily separated student in the model, feeling that "...their leaving would be explained by factors in the model that apply to voluntary departure" (Braxton, Ed., 2000. p 55). This model is proposed "as a heuristic device in order to visualize how individual psychological processes can be understood in the retention process" (Braxton, Ed., 2000. p 55). Bean and Eaton describe the model as a psychological model that is "intended to explain behavior, that indicate that a given behavior is a choice, and that assumes people are motivated to make choices that lead to or away from any given behavior" (Braxton, Ed., 2000. p 56).

Bean and Eaton postulate that students enter college with pre-existing characteristics and interact with the institutional environment. In this institutional environment, several psychological processes take place. These processes are iterative and reciprocal with continuous adjustment depending on the feedback the student receives. If the student is successful, academic and social integration result as intermediate outcomes; producing a student attitude of institutional fit and loyalty. This leads directly to the behavior of persistence. See Figure 2.7.

A Psychological Model of College Student Retention

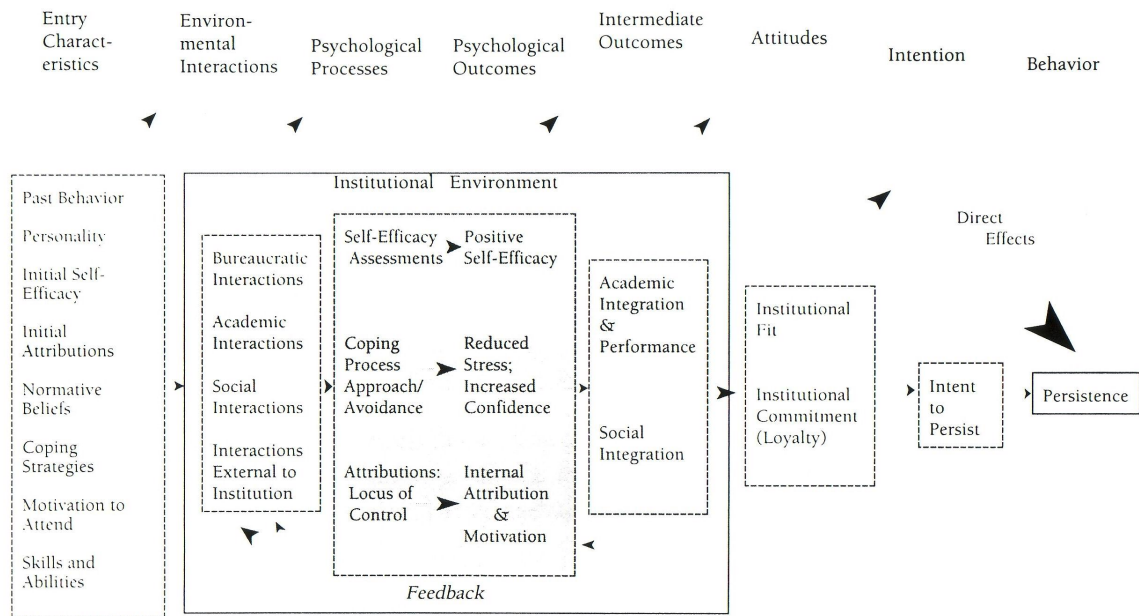


Figure 2.7: Bean and Eaton’s Psychological Model of Student Retention 2000
(Braxton, Ed., 2000, p 57)

PRIMARY FOCI OF THEORIES

Spady (1970 and 1971)

Normative congruence is critical to Spady’s model. This results from the interaction of the student’s goals, interests, and personality dispositions with the subsystems of the college. The core of Spady’s model is summed up by Summers (2003), “Students who did not share similar values and orientations similar to other students, did not interact socially with other students, and generally did not feel compatible with the social system of college were more likely to drop out” (p 66).

Socialization to the college culture and with other students is considered critical to the decision to persist.

Tinto (1975 and 1993)

Tinto argues that the student's experiences after he/she enters college, "primarily those arising out of interactions between the individual and other members of the college," (Tinto, 1973, p 114) either result in academic and social integration, or a failure to integrate into the college environment. Tinto is clear that he believes that informal contact between the student and faculty is critical. He acknowledges that the influence of external communities has a powerful impact on the student's persistence decision, but the central issue is that "the model posits that, other things being equal, the lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p 116).

Pascarella (1980)

In Pascarella's model, the most critical elements are informal contact with faculty and other college experiences, with the stress on the importance of informal contact with the faculty (Pascarella, 1980; DeRemers, 2003).

Bean and Metzner's (1985)

Bean and Metzner's model is focused on nontraditional students and posits that environmental variables external to the college (finances, work hours, family responsibilities, opportunity to transfer) prevent the social integration of the

nontraditional student to the college culture and are most critical to the decision to persist or dropout. Bean and Metzner assume that the nontraditional student will not be socially integrated into the college community; they do not address whether a nontraditional student can or should be socially integrated.

Bean and Eaton (2000)

Bean and Eaton's model is a psychological model. It is a visualization of how individual psychological processes can be understood in the retention process. If the student is successful, academic and social integration result, producing a student attitude of institutional fit and loyalty, which leads directly to the behavior of persistence.

OTHER RESEACH ON ATTRITION AND RETENTION

A review of the literature dealing with retention and persistence in higher education must include the work of other well-known authors. These are addressed below.

Student Advising and Counseling

Good student advising and counseling play an important role in student retention and have significant implications for new student orientation and retention programs.

Crockett states that effectively delivered academic advising “can be a powerful influence on student development and learning and as such, can be a potent retention force on the campus.” (Noel, Levitz, et al., 1985, p 244). This assertion is based on an

assumption that assisting students in clarifying their educational and career goals, and linking academic programs and courses to those goals is a key element in student retention programs. Further, Crockett proposes that advising be viewed not as a perfunctory process of providing routine information and developing a schedule of classes for the student, but rather as developmental function with a goal of student growth. This growth process includes the exploring life and career goals before selecting of a program of study. On that basis courses are selected and then the student is registered for specific courses for the semester. Through this process, students have clear life and career goals and a plan to fulfill those goals.

Crockett also proposes models for delivery of advising. His first consideration is the level of control by the institution in the delivery of advising, acknowledging that there is no one best structure. The options range from a totally decentralized to a totally centralized structured administration of advising services. Key in deciding the best structures at an institution are the advising needs of the students and the organizational structure of the college. As “delivery systems” (p 250) Crockett emphasizes faculty and professional advisors. However, he also believes that some institutions may make good use of peer and paraprofessional advisors.

Crockett stresses that “good advising does not just happen; it is the result of a carefully developed institutional plan and a commitment to excellence in advising.” (p. 245). This is a critical element if advising is to be effective in retention efforts.

With parallel logic, Rayman and Garis make a similar argument for the value of counseling services in new student retention programs (Upcraft, Gardner & Assoc. 1989).

They stress that they are not advocating clinical counseling for treatment. Rather, they are advocating counseling services that are proactive. The counseling services must be planned and programmatic in order to deal with new student issues before they occur. These services can be used to assist in new student transition to college by addressing three issue areas: personal and social issues, academic issues, and career issues. Two of these issues, academic and career, are virtually the same issues addressed by Crockett.

Rayman and Garis make several recommendations for the delivery of counseling services that are effective in facilitating new student retention. Briefly, counseling services must provide:

1. A broad range of delivery modes which include walk-in; by appointment; small group on a wide range of issues; credit courses dealing with the personal, academic and career issues; computer assisted assessment and guidance; peer counseling; brochures; and outreach programs.
2. Adequate crises intervention to deal with the small but critical number of students who need psychiatric consultation, diagnosis of pathology, development of institutional policies for crises, and consideration of mandatory health insurance that includes psychiatric care.
3. Rewarding quality counseling.
4. Integrated with faculty, staff and administration. This includes coordination with orientation programs
5. Meet the needs of the diverse population.
6. Focus on developmental rather than clinical issues.

7. Confidence that services are based on researched and documented developmental theory.

Based on these authors, the literature indicates that student advising and counseling, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services, have critical implications in new student orientation and retention programs.

Time Sensitivity of Retention Efforts

The literature documents another key factor that is absolutely critical for consideration in retention efforts: the efforts must be made early in the student's higher education experience. Levitz and Noel writing in The Freshman Year Experience (Upcraft, Gardner and Associates, 1989) state that an institution has "a window of opportunity for establishing a firm and positive relationship with the freshmen – but the window is narrow indeed." (p. 66). Further, the authors cite a 1981 study by Myers, which addresses the timing of students dropping out during the semester that suggests that the window of opportunity is within the first six weeks of the semester. Although the time sensitivity of retention efforts is implied by the nature of the topic, Noel and Levitz cite numerous studies that reiterate that most attrition occurs within the first few weeks of the student's first semester. Retention efforts must begin immediately, preferably before the student even begins the semester, and continue throughout the first semester with emphasis on the first critical weeks.

Levitz and Noel, in agreement with previously cited theories, reiterate, "that a caring attitude or faculty and staff is the most potent retention force on campus." (p 66).

SUMMARY OF ATTRITION THEORY ELEMENTS

There are two common threads through these models of attrition or retention. The first is that the move into the college environment is a major change for the new student and how well the student adapts to that environment plays a major role in the student's integration into the college both academically and socially. It is this integration that leads to a commitment to the institution and to the student's academic goal, which results in retention, or, if the integration does not occur, to attrition.

When considered in the context of the community college new student population, the magnitude of that change is astounding. As stated, the community college student population has a large percentage of students who are academically under prepared, first generation college attendees, or who grew up in segregated neighborhoods. This segregation provides them little practice in interacting with different races and ethnicities. These students enter a college environment in which the academic standards far exceed those of their high schools. The student's situation is further complicated by:

1. Often having little support from a family that does not understand what the student is experiencing since they never had the college experience; being unsure of their academic ability but finding themselves in an academic environment with virtually all of the administrators and faculty having masters degrees, if not doctorates; and the diversity of the college population with which they must interact. If these students are to be retained, the college must take action, and take it quickly after the student starts his/her higher education experience, to facilitate the student's adjustment and integration into the college culture and society.

2. The powerful influence of student social integration into both the academic and peer culture of the college. This power is even stressed by Bean and Metzner's model, although they view it as not possible for nontraditional students. As a subset of this social integration, the predominance of informal interaction between the student and faculty is stressed both the Tinto and Pascarella.
3. These issues, and especially the lack of knowledge about higher education that is characteristic of first generation college students, increases not only the difficulty but the importance of good advising and counseling to ensure that the at-risk student has the knowledge and support to be successful in higher education.
4. Given that many community college students are at-risk, the time "window of opportunity" cited by Noel and Levitz is critical in community college orientation programs.

PERSISTENCE THEORY FACTORS THAT CAN BE ADDRESSED IN NEW STUDENT ORIENTATIONS

Assuming that these models hold valid for the community college, collectively they indicate issues that should be addressed at each college in a manner appropriate to the unique situation at each college. Community colleges must have programs that:

1. Promote academic success.
2. Provide for informal interaction with the faculty.
3. Encourage social integration into the nonacademic aspects of the college culture to include friends, peer support, and college activities outside of the classroom.

4. Reduce interference from external variables including finances, time constraints imposed by work and family obligations.
5. Student advising and counseling, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services, are critical.
6. Orientation and retention programs must be employed early in the first semester of a student's higher education experience

CURRENT PRACTICE IN THE LITERATURE

Socialization is a critical issue both to retention and to the success of freshmen and some orientation programs are addressing the problem of socializing students into the college culture. James A. Anderson, the dean of undergraduate studies at North Carolina State (NCS) stated, "...most dropouts were getting by academically. They just hadn't anchored themselves to the Institution..." (Gose, 1995, p 2) It should be noted that NCS had only 11 percent of the freshmen not return for their sophomore year where the national average is around 30 percent (Geraghty, 1996). The problem of academic competence is much greater in community colleges with the high percentage of under prepared, part time and commuter students, (Roueche & Roueche 1993), which makes the issue of socialization harder, but more important, to accomplish. And numerous institutions, including community colleges, are incorporating socialization programs into their orientation programs. These efforts range from as simple as orientation "coffee breaks" with the faculty at the Whidbey campus of Skagit Valley College (Chronicle 1990) to community service projects and sporting events.

A good example of using sporting events for team building and socialization is at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where freshmen orientation culminates in “dragon boat racing.” (Chronicle, 1996) Dragon boat racing is a Chinese sport that is popular at local events and involves about 20 people rowing in unison –building teamwork, which results in peer groups that can become support groups.

The University of North Carolina at Asheville is trying to bridge the gap between the campus and the community by sending out teams of volunteers that include freshmen students, faculty and staff to community service projects throughout the area. (Chronicle, 1997) The approach was described as “creating high energy” and, in addition to the good will generated with the local community, the program contributes to making the new freshmen a part of the university and provides interaction with faculty and staff on a social basis – critical elements of socialization.

The success of these efforts to socialize the freshmen agrees with Vincent Tinto’s research findings on learning communities. He states that one of the benefits of learning communities is that students tend to develop peer support groups and derive personal support from their interactions, increasing persistence and academic success. (Tinto 2002)

Program design is critical to the success of orientation programs, but it is also important that college structures support student orientation at the institution. In an article on colleges as “total institutions,” the authors conclude that the concept has implications for orientation and student life. Specifically:

Orientation programs need to recognize both the rewards and the anxieties that necessarily flow from membership in a total institution in addition to providing information about how to do things in the institution. Colleges need to evaluate thoroughly how their structures and their various rules and regulations affect students' lives and their self-perceptions (and, in turn, affect prospective students' perceptions about the institution.) (Gibbon, Canterbury & Litten 1999).

The importance of design was illustrated when dissatisfaction with the freshman seminar course at a community college generated a study, which indicated that the dissatisfaction was largely from older adult learners and indicated that there were drawbacks of grouping students with wide ranging levels of academic abilities into the same course (Rhodes & Califio 1999). This is reinforced by similar results in another survey at a California community college. (Henreiksen 1995)

Innovative approaches, which are "outside the box," are being used to help students adjust (Chronicle, 1994) and include a wide range of methods, at least one begins before students leave high school. In Georgia higher education officials are trying to increase the preparedness of students by convincing high school students that college preparation is hip and important by using a 30-second radio advertisement, in rap, targeting middle school students. (Hebel 1999) Loyola Marymount tried instant messaging by distributing pagers and sending orientation messages. Although reporting that it was an "instant hit with students and their parents," assessment data was not

provided to either substantiate that statement or give insight to the project's context within persistence theory. (Chronicle "Info Tech" 1999) Even more unique is Elon College's inclusion of freshmen's siblings by inviting them to attend the orientation program with their newly admitted family member (Geraghty, 1996).

Orientation programs that are restricted to attendance by minority students are not uncommon and, like general orientation programs, are designed to assist a group in successfully negotiating the new environment of higher learning. (Brown, D. 2000) Many of these programs are broad in scope, but some target specific skills to close gaps for specific populations (Young, J. 1996). Although there is some literature that questions the need for separate minority programs and that even raise the question of the possibility that minority programs could encourage segregation (Gose 1998), the assessments that were found on minority orientations document their success in facilitating the success of minority students into college (Rita & Bacote 1997 and Brown, D. 2000). However, neither study controlled for differences in 'minority only' versus 'general population' orientation programs although it was clear in the discussion of the need for separate programs that the ability to address minority issues openly was much easier in the minority only programs (Gose, 1998). The repeated themes in the specialized programs are that they are tailored to meet the needs of students who are academically under-prepared and socialization issues with both the students' peers (relation to a common group) and to the academic institution (Parker 1997; Parker 1998; McDaniel & Graham 2001; Hurd 2000; Mason 1998; Smith 1999; Avalos & Pavel 1993; Uyteebrouk 2001; Hoyt 1999; Grimes 1997; Kerka 1988; Peterman 2000).

Although the effectiveness of some “innovative programs” was not measured, there are several studies on the effectiveness of freshmen orientation and seminar programs in general, and they reflect the same success found with the minority programs. One study at an institution that had created a retention position had a drop from 26 to 10 percent of freshmen not returning for their sophomore year. But none of the analysis was controlled for other factors such as improving procedures in bursar, financial aid and registration offices (Geraghty 1996). Another study found that students who participated in the freshman year experience course continued to their second year of study at a significantly higher rate (Sidle 1999). Also, a four-college study in North Carolina found that completing an orientation program promoted and improved student performance regardless of age, gender, race, entrance exam scores or employment status. (Brawer 1996) Positive effects of orientation programs were also found in other studies (House & Kuchynka 1997) and (Howard & Jones 2000).

Also, there is limited literature on the effectiveness of outdoor orientation programs in higher education. In a study of 319 freshmen at Salisbury State University, participants in the outdoor program had better adjustment and retention rates than students in the classroom or the alternative program (Brown, D. 1998).

Faculty involvement in freshmen programs can take many forms. Richland Community College has redesigned its orientation program and put the college’s orientation in “upbeat” 20-minute segments on CD-ROMs and also involved faculty as advisors to assist the staff with advising and registration to interact with the freshmen. Also at Richland Community College, some professors have contracts for up to 240 hours

of advising for additional pay (Lords 2000). Kuh recommends that faculty link the curriculum and academic goals more closely with student life outside the classroom by requiring students to show how they use the class material in other areas of their lives (Kuh, 1994). Other specific faculty involvement was not found but one article cited a trend of transferring orientation programs from student affairs to academic affairs (Greenlaw, 1997).

Deal (1987) and Licklieder (1993) cited the importance that integrating new students into the institutional culture (values, traditions, rituals, history, ceremonies, and cultural networks) can play in promoting student integration into the college. However, literature specifically addressing this practice is exceptionally limited.

No direct reference to the individual student's responsibility in their own retention was found. However, there has been some research on "Quality of Effort" factors as elements of student involvement in learning. Based on previous work, which dealt with 'time' as a frequency measure and 'effort' as a quality measure (Pace 1982), Smith conducted research using a small sample of "persisters" and concluded that interaction with faculty and "participation in higher order course activities" were identified with persistence and attendance at night only and "perceptions of job responsibilities" were negative indicators (Smith 1993).

Programs vary but are all intended to improve student learning, which most would agree is important to academic affairs and the faculty. Involvement by the academic side of institutions also varies, but where there is a collaboration between student and academic affairs, students and faculty reap significant rewards; and " ...we learn the

importance of collaboration among faculty and student affairs professionals to the success of these and other freshman year programs.” (Tinto, 1998). In the course of the research, it became clear that there is a lack of coordination, or worse the conflict, between academic and student affairs divisions in some institutions. However, there is a limited body of literature that stresses the need for collaboration between academic and student affairs (Reger, Hyman 1989; Brown, S, 1989; Tinto 1993, 1998, 2002) and the collaborative effort needed to return students to the center of education (Brandy 1999).

Even more troubling than the failure of institutions to coordinate orientation programs between their academic and student services areas, was the faculty attitude towards orientation programs, and towards students in some cases. This is evidenced in a specific occurrence. After an analysis of the freshmen programs at a small liberal arts college which demonstrated its success in improving the at risk students with the involvement of the faculty, one third of the faculty remained antagonistic, not because they doubted the positive effects but because they believed that at-risk students should not be served. (Foster, Swallow, Fodor & Foulser 1999) Although this was at a four-year institution and the only article to cite this situation, it would be naïve to assume this is not an issue to some degree in community colleges.

AREAS FOR RESEARCH

None of the models discussed are community college specific; they are at best for higher education in general. However, their development is based on the four-year institution. Given the large percentage of students in higher education that attend

community colleges and the fact that a large portion of the community college population is at risk, more research specifically addressing persistence in community colleges is needed.

Although some colleges have taken innovative steps to improve the utility of new student orientation programs to facilitate persistence, much is left to do in this area. Research is needed on how to use orientation programs more effectively in promoting student persistence at community colleges. Further, a model of how to conduct new student orientation programs using the factors postulated in persistence should be developed and analyzed through research to improve retention.

CONCLUSION

Community colleges serve many separate populations encompassing the spectrum in age, ethnicity, religion and virtually every dimension of diversity, including the varied goals of students. Each of these populations has its own needs and one method will not be appropriate for all. However, first time freshman students are a population with high attrition rates in community colleges. This loss of human capital represents an unacceptable cost to colleges, society and, most importantly, to the students. Colleges must take action to improve retention rates through multiple initiatives to reduce attrition and provide every opportunity for students to achieve their higher education goals. An obvious place to start the process at community colleges is with the improvement of new student orientation programs using the factors of persistence theory to improve learning outcomes.

Ramist (1981) stated the basic value of orientation programs succinctly, “Obviously, to retain students by helping them make the most of their college experience, a good start is necessary. Therefore, the orientation program takes on an especially important role” (p 16). If the goal of community colleges is to retain students until they achieve their academic goals, then community colleges must discover the applicability of theoretical models of persistence and apply them from the beginning of a student’s college experience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the rationale for the qualitative study approach, followed by a description of the methods employed during this study including the data collection and analysis methods that will be employed. This study is based on the concept that the students' needs and the aspects of persistence theory that can be practically incorporated into the programs should inform the design of new student orientation programs. The conceptual basis for the design of this study is illustrated in the conceptual model at Figure 3.1, below. This model represents the data collection points with circles and the comparisons with arrows.

The design of this study is predicated on the following research questions:

1. What are the implications of persistence theory literature for student orientation programs?
2. What are the expressed issues and needs of new community college students, and to what extent can student orientation programs meet those needs?
3. What are the community college administrator perceptions of the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs?
4. What are the importance, role, and function of new student orientations as evidenced by program documentation?

5. What is the correspondence among administrators' perceptions of orientation programs, the characteristics of the programs themselves, research implications for orientations, and the expressed issues and needs of students?

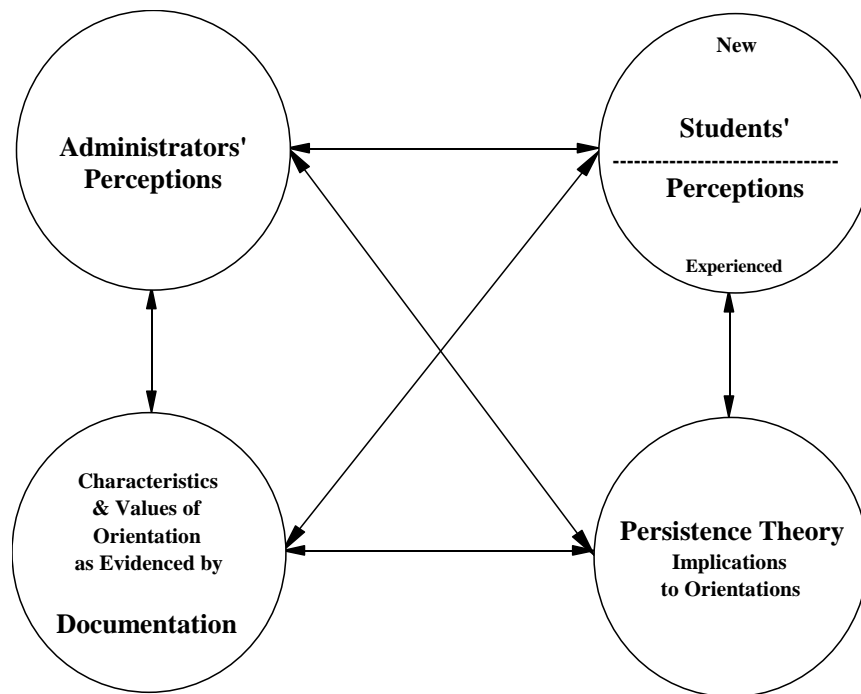


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model of Study

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study to determine perceptions of community college students and administrators pertaining to new student orientation programs; examine the college's documentation relevant to orientation programs to determine the emphasis evidenced by policy, procedures and resources; and to examine new student orientation programs and the data gathered in light of each data source and persistence theory. This qualitative,

alternative inquiry methodology was selected as the most effective method for initial investigation based on the work of Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln 1996).

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it is a means of providing insight into data gathered through interactive interviews and inferences derived from documentation that could not be gathered through quantitative analysis. This method is also appropriate because it facilitates the detection of emerging themes from those interviewed. Patton (1990) states, "...qualitative inquiry strategy emphasizes and builds on several interconnected themes" (p.39). The characteristic strengths of qualitative research include deep, detailed meaning based on overt data combined with more subtle nuances (Patton, 1990). As stated by Patton (1990), "These data are descriptive. Pure description and quotations are the raw data of qualitative inquiry (p.31). Further, Yin (1994) specifies three conditions that should be considered in the selection of a research strategy: "(a) the type of research questions posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events" (p. 4). These clearly indicate the appropriateness of the qualitative methodology.

METHOD

Overview

This study design was informed by underlying principles for qualitative research posited by Northcutt and McCoy (2004). Specific use was made of the principles and processes as for conduct of interviews and analysis of interview data based on their work

dealing with qualitative data gathering and analysis process designed to capture a socially constructed view of the respondents' reality.

Selection of College

Purposeful sampling was used to select the college for this study. The participant college was selected based on the college president's willingness to participate in the study and the convenience (time available and costs) to the researcher. Also, selection of the college was contingent on the willingness of a minimum of three administrators to participate in the study. The college selected is a comprehensive community college in the southeastern United States with a reputation for excellence. The researcher is mindful of the political ramifications of identifying data that may be in conflict with the community college's image and reputation. The identity of the college will not be used and all interviews were reviewed to preclude use of identifying information.

Selection of Administrators

Purposeful sampling was used to select the administrators for interview at the participating college. Administrators were either responsible for the allocation of resources (fiscal and human), responsible for the design and/or execution of new student orientation programs, or significantly impacted by the success of those orientation programs. Specific administrators of interests include, but were not limited to, the president, vice presidents of student services and instruction, and the administrators directly responsible for development and oversight of the orientation program. Seven administrators were formally interviewed: President, Executive Vice President, Vice

President for Education, Vice President for Student Services, Associate Vice President for Student Services, the administrator that developed the on-line orientation program, and a staff member who was the former Director of Student Activities.

Selection of Students

Two categories of students were selected for participation by purposeful sampling, which McMillan (2000, p 108) refers to as “judgment sampling.” Also, “snowball, chain or networking sampling” (Merriam 2001 p 63) was used. In every case, students were volunteers and not compensated. Students were selected for their diversity of background and educational experience, willingness to participate, and meeting of the classifications of “new students” and “experienced students” as defined below.

Initial contact with possible student participants was made through the use of several approaches:

1. The researcher made brief presentations of the study goals and solicited participation in numerous classes. In an effort to select participants with a wide range of ages, academic backgrounds, and academic abilities, the researcher visited technical and transfer courses and both day and evening classes. Students were also encouraged to invite peers to participate in the study.
2. Some first semester students were identified during their registration for their second semester in the early April 2004 time frame.
3. Two group interviews were conducted after the researcher was requested by the instructor of the two sections of a college skills course to meet with the classes during the class period. Participation in these interviews was voluntary.

4. Some of the participants of the group interviews were requested to conduct individual interviews following the group interview.

Identifying a diverse population of students in terms of age, backgrounds and academic experience was important as Patton (1990, p. 172) posits that “Findings from even a small sample of great diversity provides important shard patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerges out of heterogeneity.”

The two categories of students were:

1. New students were as close to initial enrollment as feasible, preferably within the first semester of classes in the community college. Of the sixteen students interviewed in this category, eleven were in their first semester of higher education and five were in their second semester. In all cases, student higher education experience was limited to that at the participating community college.
2. Experienced students were those who had completed a minimum of two semesters in a higher education institution and had returned for the semester, in which the data was collected, i.e. students in their third or more semester of higher education. For this sample, participants were not limited to those who had only attended community college. The intent was to interview students from the spectrum of community college students and to identify participants with a diversity of educational experiences.

Selection and Collection of Documentation

Documentation reviewed consisted of any documentation that evidenced the actual content of the student orientation program, the intent or purpose of the program, and the resources committed to the program. Specific documents included, but were not limited to: curriculum, lesson plans, policies, faculty involvement, and budget pertaining to the new student orientation program. Specific issues examined within the documentation are at Appendix F.

Data Collection for Persons

Data collection from both student groups and administrators was done using individual interviews. The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and were conducted in an informal but professional setting at a time convenient to the administrator or student by appointment. The locations for student interviews were varied based on convenience for the student. These included, but were not limited to, the researcher's office, the student center, vacant classrooms, quiet areas on the campus grounds and the library. Additionally, two college skills class sections participated as group interviews, with follow up individual interviews being conducted for some of the individuals. Both group interviews and 28 of the total of 32 individual student interviews were conducted prior to the administrator interviews and were used to inform the administrator interviews and soliciting the administrators' responses to the student issues, see Appendix F.

Administrators were generally interviewed in their offices, with the exception of two that were conducted in the researcher's office at the request of the interviewees.

Interview Protocol

Merriam (2001) asserts that in all forms of qualitative research some of the data are collected using interviews, either individual or group. Further, an interview can be defined as a conversation that has a purpose. The primary purpose is to determine ‘what is in someone’s mind.’ That is, the intent of the interview is to determine what is the interviewee’s view of reality.

As stated by Patton:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective (Patton,1990, p 196).

Also relevant to the use of interviews is Merriam’s (2001) statement that “interviewing can be used to collect data from a large number of people representing a broad range of ideas” (p 72). It is well established that the students attending a community college represent a broad range of ideas concerning higher education. In addition to a diversity of race and ethnicity, community college students represent a broad range of ages, educational backgrounds and goals, financial and family situations,

and life experience. The use of interviews facilitated capturing at least some of these perspectives.

The interviews, both for students and administrators, were designed to be informal and with minimal structure as categorized by Merriam (2001). However, in both cases the intent was to explore views of the interviewees relevant to the literature on retention. Therefore, some structure was needed to ensure that these areas were explored. For this reason, questions for each category of interviewee were developed but the conduct of the interview was informal and open-ended.

For each interview, the underlying principles derived from the literature were used to draft the questions and to guide the interview, see Appendix A. Questions that were the guidance for each interview found in Appendices B, C, and D.

New Students

For New Students, the focus of the data collection was to gather information on the perceived concerns, fears, anxieties and needs of students as they begin their community college education. Since new students are the target audience of new student orientation programs, their concerns are the logical basis for the orientation programs.

Experienced Students

For Experienced Students, the focus of the data collection was to gather information about their retrospective perceptions based on reflection about the new student orientation experience as it related to their experiences in the transition,

socialization and success during the first year of community college education. Since experienced students were the target audience of new student orientations and they have succeeded by returning after their first year of college, their perspectives were instructive concerning content of the orientation.

Data Collection – Administrators

The focus of the administrator interviews was to collect data on the administrator's perspective on the orientation function with emphasis on the purpose and value of the program. The new students' issues, which were identified during student interviews, Appendix F, informed the administrators' interview.

Other Data Collection

1. Observations were made by the researcher throughout the time at the college and during each interview.
2. Researcher journaling was done throughout the data collection phase of the study.

Analysis

The data from each source (new students, experienced students, administrators, documentation and theory) was aggregated to identify themes, commonalities, and divergence internal to the source group. Aggregated data from each source was then compared with the data from the other source groups. Of particular interest was the

utility of aspects of persistence theory for meeting the perceived needs of the students and the stated purposes and goals of administrators.

Audio taped transcripts and the researcher's field notes were thematically coded and categorized. Thematic analysis was used as a means to identify patterns within the data sources. Following is a description of that process based on the work of Northcutt and McCoy (2004).

After all interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audiotapes, the researcher conducted a narrative analysis to identify themes or affinities. The initial step in this process was axial coding, accomplished through multiple review of each transcript within each data source, i.e. new students, experienced students and finally administrators. The researcher conducted analysis of each transcript to identify axial codes, "*which are specific examples of discourse that illustrate or allude to an affinity.*" (Northcutt and McCoy, 2004, p 242). The researcher reviewed each line of the transcripts to identify phrases or statements that define, or are examples of, specific themes or affinities. As keywords and phrases were identified they were documented with transcript line numbers for retrieval.

Using inductive coding, the researcher grouped the keywords and phrases as they were identified. These groupings were then reviewed multiple times to refine the groupings. "The intent of this process is to categorize data into thematically organized groupings, referred to as affinities" (Northcutt and McCoy, 2004, p 98). After inductive coding was completed, the researcher assigned a name to each affinity, or thematic grouping, that was representative of the affinity's content.

Data credibility was determined by the triangulation among multiple interviews with students and with administrators, observation, document review and journaling.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the methodology used in this qualitative study. The first four research questions deal with the examination of student orientation programs from four perspectives: the literature, the students, the administrators, and the documentation of existing orientation programs at the college.

To determine the perspective of the literature, a meta-analysis of the literature dealing persistence, retention and attrition was used to determine aspects of the literature that were feasible for informing orientation program design. The perspective of the student and the administrators was investigated through individual interviews. A document review was conducted to determine what information could be gained from the documentation.

The fifth research question was the correspondence of the four perspectives. This analysis was accomplished using pair-wise comparison.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter is a report of the findings for all four perspectives of this study:

1. The Perspective of the Literature
2. Students' Perspective. This includes both new and experienced students.
3. The Administrators' Perspective
4. The Perspective as evidenced in documentation.

The literature perspective is derived in its entirety from the literature review.

Both the administrator and student findings are reported as both individual narratives and a synthesis of responses. The quotations used in this chapter are as close to the verbatim transcriptions as possible. Although minimal editing was necessary to facilitate clarity, the interviewee's voice, especially in the case of students, was used. Although difficult to read at times, the interviewee's words contribute a valuable insight.

The Documentation Perspective findings are a compilation of the data derived from sources not included in the literature, student interviews, or administrator interviews. Documentation consisted of any documentation that evidenced the actual content of the new student orientation program, the intent or purpose of the program, and the resources committed to it. Specific documents included, but were not limited to: curriculum, lesson plans, policies, faculty involvement, and budget pertaining to the new student orientation program.

Organization of the Findings

In order to facilitate reading of the findings contained in this chapter, an organization of the chapter is presented here.

Data were collected on four research questions. The findings for the documentation question (research question 4) proved to be critical to understanding the context and environment for the student and administrator perspectives. For this reason, presentation of the findings for research question 4 (documentation) precedes the findings for the student and administrator perspectives (research questions 2 and 3, respectively). Therefore, the order for presentation of the findings is: research question 1 (the literature perspective), research question 4 (the documentation perspective), research question 2 (the student perspective), and research question 3 (the administrator perspective). In the text of the findings, research questions are labeled with bolded headers. Analysis of the data determined the affinities that are presented in underlined italics headings; and sub-affinities that are presented in indented headings. In some instances, subtopics are presented under indented headings. The methodology used for determination of the listed affinities is specified in Chapter 3 of this study. Note that only a brief explanatory comment is made for each affinity and sub-affinity in the text of Chapter 4. The detailed analysis is contained in Chapter 5.

The organization followed in both the Findings in Chapter 4 and the Analysis in Chapter 5 follows:

Research Question 1 - The Literature Perspective

Persistence Theory Implications for New Student Orientations

Research Question 4 – Key Issues from the Documentation

Institutional Effectiveness

Funding

Human Resources

Facilities

Admission and Registration Center

Student Center

Past Orientation System

Your Key to Success: 2003 – 2004 Student orientation Guide

Your Key to Success: 1999 – 2000 Student orientation Guide

On-Line Orientation System

Orientation Development

Orientation Content

Student Activities

Events

Student Organizations

Registration Period

Observation

Research Question 2 - The Student Perspective

Why Students Say They Start College in the First Place:

Pragmatism

Idealism

Trouble from the Beginning

For the Money

Mom (or Dad) Said So

The Unexpected

High School's Relevance to Community College Students

Under-Prepared

And the prepared

Student Maturity, or the Absence Thereof

Study – Why? How?

And from those who do know how to study

Age – The Issue That Is Not an Issue

Age, Perceived a Barrier to Starting

The Resolution of the Age Fear

Differences in Age Groups

Benefits of Diversity of Age

Other Concerns and Fears of New Students: The Low Self Esteem of Students

Fear of Academic Failure

Being in the wrong course of study or profession

Paying for College

Access: The Issue that was Not Mentioned

College vs. Work and Children and the Accompanying Guilt

Work and Study

Priorities

Using the course scheduling.

Children and Study

Not limited to mothers.

Children and the Guilt

Other Distractions and the Student Social Life

Medical Issues

Student Social Life

Activities

A different perspective

I Want to go to a Real College

Instructors – A Key

Importance

What Makes a Good Instructor: As Seen by the Student

Perception that they Care; By Deed and by Word

Challenge

Not Boring – But Involved and Understanding

Been in the Workforce

What Makes a Bad Instructor: As Seen by the Student

Lack of Classroom Discipline

Advising – Another Key

Some Students do Not Understand Why They are Taking a Course

Developmental Classes – The Issue from the students' viewpoint

Why Students Say They Stay

First the negative

Parents, Family and Friends

For Themselves

Job Related

Faculty and College Academic Programs

Focus through Professional Help

Student Suggestions on Retention

Clueless, In and About College

Orientation Suggestions from Students

An Interesting Perspective

What is Expected in College

Expectations in General

Faculty Involvement: Expectations

Lessons from Students who had Been There

Understanding Processes

Academic

Administrative

Tour of the College; often suggested in conjunction with other items

Unintended advice from Students to Administrators

Concluding Comment: One to Remember

Research Question 3 - The Administrators' Perspective

What do you see as the purpose of student orientation and the reception to the college during the first semester or year at college? What is its goal?

How do you orient your new students to your college and to the college experience

How well do you think your orientation and reception processes are doing in meeting your purpose and goals for the orientation?

Subjective Evaluation

Objective Evaluation - Data

How do you think retention can best be facilitated at your institution?

Registration's Direct Effects

Mandatory or Voluntary Orientation

Student Expectations

Study Skills

Developmental Course Students

Goal Orientation

"Real College"

Student Interaction

Campus Activities

Priorities and Culture – The Key

Priorities

Culture

General Climate

FINDINGS

Research Question 1 - The Literature Perspective

What are the implications of persistence theory literature for student orientation?

The literature review of this study, Chapter 2, contains a through discussion of persistence theory along with its importance and relevance to community college orientation programs. To ensure continuity and completeness of Chapter 4, a succinct summary of the major persistence theories is included here in direct answer to the first research question, which is the foundation of this study.

Spady (1970 and 1971)

Normative congruence is critical to Spady's model. This results from the interaction between the student's goals, interests, and personality dispositions and the subsystems of the college. The core of Spady's model is summarized by Summers (2003), "Students who did not share similar values and orientations similar to other students, did not interact socially with other students, and generally did not feel compatible with the social system of college were more likely to drop out" (p 66).

Socialization to the college culture and with other students is considered critical to the decision to persist.

Tinto (1975 and 1993)

Tinto argues that the student's experiences after he/she enters college, "primarily those arising out of interactions between the individual and other members of the college," (Tinto, 1973, p 114) either results in academic and social integration, or a failure to integrate into the college environment. Tinto is clear that he believes that informal contact between the student and faculty is critical. He acknowledges that the influence of external communities has a powerful impact on the student's persistence decision, but the central issue is that "the model posits that, other things being equal, the lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p 116).

Pascarella (1980)

In Pascarella's model, the most critical elements are informal contact with faculty and other college experiences, with the stress on the importance of informal contact with the faculty (Pascarella, 1980; DeRemers, 2003).

Bean and Metzner's (1985)

Bean and Metzner's model is focused on nontraditional students and posits that environmental variables external to the college (finances, work hours, family responsibilities, opportunity to transfer) prevent the social integration of the nontraditional student to the college culture and are most critical to the decision to persist or dropout. Bean and Metzner assume that the nontraditional student will not be socially

integrated into the college community; they do not address whether a nontraditional student can or should be socially integrated.

Bean and Eaton (2000)

Bean and Eaton's model is a psychological model. It is a visualization of how individual psychological processes can be understood in the retention process. If the student is successful, academic and social integration result, producing a student attitude of institutional fit and loyalty, which leads directly to the behavior of persistence.

Persistence Theory Implications for New Student Orientation Programs

Assuming that these models hold valid for the community college, collectively they indicate issues that should be addressed at each college in the manner appropriate to the unique situation at each college.

The implications of the literature are that community colleges must have programs for students that:

1. Promote academic success.
2. Provide for informal interaction with the faculty.
3. Encourage social integration into the nonacademic aspects of the college culture to include friends, peer support, and college activities outside of the classroom.
4. Reduce interference from external variables e.g. finances, work and family obligations.
5. Provide student advising and counseling, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services.

6. Orientation and retention programs must be employed early in the first semester of a student's higher education experience

Research Question 4 – Key Issues from the Documentation

What are the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs as evidenced by program documentation?

This section provides another view of the orientation process at SCC during the data collection period. It is based on researcher's observations; field notes numerous informal conversations during the data collection period, written and electronic documents relevant to orientation and new student reception programs. These provide insight into the orientation programs, reflect programs that could serve to facilitate student integration into the college culture and climate, and reflect the context in which both the students and administrators develop and employ their perspectives.

Institutional Effectiveness

SCC did not have an institutional effectiveness indicator of student retention or persistent other than that produced by the State Education Department from raw data inputted by SCC into the statewide computer system. This indicator was defined based on the completion of program by 150% of the program length. SCC did not specifically monitor retention or attrition.

Funding

The SCC budget did not contain a separate line item for orientation or programs clearly delineated to support orientation related activities. The funding for the new on-line orientation software procurement and annual fees was imbedded in the Student Services budget. Costs for the initial procurement of the software package and the annual usage fee for the recently implemented on-line orientation were funded from the routine student services budget.

Human Resources

The Student Activities Director was a part-time temporary volunteer with seven months experience in the capacity.

Facilities

Admission and Registration Center

At the time of the study, SCC had recently co-located all registration operations into a completely renovated and well-decorated facility. The functions included in the facility were a reception desk, testing, advising, veterans aid office, financial aid, business office, a computer lab in which students can access the new on-line orientation, and offices of Student Services personnel. Additionally, the college-operated bookstore was co-located. This facility was approximately three-fourths of a mile from the main campus.

Although all admission, testing registration functions and the bookstore were co-located in the Admission and Registration center, the required student ID card as well as parking permits were issued either at the main campus or at branch campuses in the case of parking permits.

Student Center

Located on the main campus, this facility contained administrative offices (including the Dean of Students, ID Card office, and others), a food area with short order items, and a student lounge area.

The food service area was also used for lunch service for the charter high school students. Accordingly, lunch tables were arranged in long, parallel rows to accommodate the high school students.

The student lounge area had several televisions suspended from the ceiling, couches arranged in rows, and a few square tables with chairs. The office for both the Student Activities Director and the Student Government were also in this area.

Past Orientation Program

Prior to the registration for Fall 2004, SCC policy was to use an individual orientation with each student speaking with a member of the START Center personally. An orientation booklet titled “Your Keys to Success” guided the presentation. Two versions of this booklet were obtained and are described below.

Your Key to Success: 2003 – 2004 Student orientation Guide

This edition is a forty-page booklet printed in black and green on cream color glossy paper with dimensions of five and three-eighths by eight and one-half inches. Pages twenty-eight through forty contained a calendar (one page per month) ending with a one-page index.

Topics covered:

1. Welcome page
2. Description of programs at each campus and a map of the campus for the main campus and map of how to drive to the branch campuses.
3. Campus Resources.
4. Student ID Cards/Parking Permits
5. How It All Fits Together – a two page explanation of Divisions, Academic Programs, Academic Calendar and Curriculum vs. Continuing Education.
6. College terms (definitions of common academic terms)
7. Simple Steps to Successful Enrollment
8. Strategies for Success (one page)
9. Academic Credit
10. Calculating Your GPA
11. Getting Your Grades
12. Advising
13. Setting Your Goals
14. Time Management

15. Directory

16. Important Things To Know

Your Key to Success: 1999 – 2000 Student orientation Guide

This edition is a twenty-four-page booklet printed in black on plain white paper with dimensions of five and three-eighths by eight and one-half inches. The twenty-fourth page is a blank note page. There is no index.

Topics covered:

1. Welcome page
2. Description of programs at each campus and a map of the campus for the main campus and map of how to drive to the branch campuses.
3. Important Things to Know - Information dropping or adding a class, changing majors, selling back of text books, that the student will be advised of an assigned advisor during the first semester.
4. Student ID Cards/Parking Permits
5. Campus Resources.
6. Adding/Dropping Classes
7. College terms
8. Simple Steps to Successful Enrollment
9. Strategies for Success (one page)
10. Academic Credit
11. Getting the Most From Your Advisor

12. When to See Your Advisor
13. Frequently Used Numbers
14. Frequently Asked Questions – How to change major; how to correct name, address or social security number; definition of full-time student; difference between a College of TV video course and an online course; and “What do I do once I have registered and paid for an online course or College on TV video course?”
15. Academic Calendar (one page) listing key date throughout the academic year.

On-Line Orientation Program

Orientation Development

The on-line orientation was implemented in March 2004 with the start of registration for Fall 2004. A document entitled “Goals of New Orientation Program” stated:

“To create a user-friendly new student orientation program using new technology. The orientation will be implementing an on-line interactive web tutorial that is user-guided through our website.”

The orientation was developed using software licensed under a four-year agreement with Teaching Gear, a corporation founded in 1998 that produces Internet technology products for use in academic, health care, and corporate situations. The package is for use in tailoring on-line orientations using options within the package.

The finished program was announced in a college wide e-mail announcement that stated:

“The College has implemented an online orientation requirement. The Online Orientation will educate new students about the availability of academic support services and the operating policies and procedures of the college. Implementation of the Online Orientation also fulfills the college’s internal Performance Indicator. New students admitted for Fall 2004 or later terms (including those who are retuning (sic) after a one year or longer absence) must complete the orientation prior to registration.”

Orientation Content

The on-line orientation was accessed by a link on SCC’s home page.

1. The initial screen, Welcome to the Online Orientation, stated what the student must do before starting the orientation (apply for admission and complete placement testing) and specified computer capabilities needed to run the orientation. The orientation was started by a “Launch this orientation” command.
2. This produced a screen that collected the name, social security number, e-mail address, academic goal, and major course of study and campus location before proceeding.
3. The next screen was “Using This Orientation” which automatically scrolled through information on how to navigate the orientation. When completed, the orientation automatically moved to Section 1.
4. Section 1 was a five page “Welcome”

- a. Page 1, Welcome, contained basic data on SCC including founding, accreditation, state supported, size of student body, “flexible schedules and a number of venues” accompanied by a picture of the SCC president.
 - b. Page 2, Your Key to Success, wished the students well in their college career and stated that the goal was to provide quality customer service at the Admissions and Registration Center.”
 - c. Page 3, We’re a multi-campus System, identified the location and programs of two campuses.
 - d. Page 4, Other Satellite Campuses, identified the location and programs of the other two campuses of the four campus college.
 - e. Page 5, Admissions and Registration Center, listed the address and offices located within the Center and a hot link to the Center’s web page.
5. Section 2 was the three page “At Your Service”
- a. Page 1, Campus Cruiser, provided basic information on the system with a hot link to the Campus Cruiser web page.
 - b. Page 2, Campus Resources, gave the addresses with hot links to the Bookstore, The Career Direction Center and Cooperative Education.
 - c. Page 3, Technology at Your Fingertips, listed the locations of computer labs at each campus.
6. Section 3 was the one page College - New Student, with a subtitle of College Terms. After stating that the student will “...need to know the lingo.” it listed:

- a. Academic Calendar as “A calendar that shows dates and deadlines throughout the semester.” With a hot link to the calendar.
 - b. Add/Drop Period with a brief definition.
 - c. Associate Degree without any other comment.
7. Section 4 was the seven pages of “Important Offices”
- a. Page 1, Information Center/Admissions, with hot link explained that the admissions office would help the students make changes to their personal record.
 - b. Page 2, Testing, with hot link concerned placement testing. The initial screen of the orientation stated that before beginning the orientation the student must complete application and placement testing.
 - c. Page 3, Transcript Evaluation contained a link to the form to request transcripts and the Course Exemption form with a comment to see the appropriate department head.
 - d. Page 4, linked to financial aid and “completing FAFSA online.”
 - e. Page 5, Business office, explained that the last step is paying and listed the methods of payment.
 - f. Page 6, Student Records and Confidentiality of Records explained the college policy on this topic.
 - g. Page 7, Online and Nontraditional Programs Division, with link, provided basic information on there programs.

8. Section 5 was the two pages “Advising/Scheduling”
 - a. Page 1, See Your Advisor on a Regular Basis, contained a list of what the advisor was available to do.
 - b. Page 2, Getting the Most From Your Advisor, listed six points to get more from the advising session.
9. Section 6 contained the pages “Plan for Success”.
 - a. Page 1 contained the definitions of Goals, Long Range Goals and Shot Range Goals.
 - b. Page 2 described how to calculate GPAs.
 - c. Page 3, Time Management, had five sub screens under the title of Planning Your Schedule that told the student to plan on two hours of preparation time for each classroom hour and to calculate the total number of hours to plan into the student’s schedule.
10. Section 7 contained the one page FAQs. Three questions were listed with answers to the first two. The third question, What is a Full time Student?” is answered only with “During Fall, Spring and Summer Semesters”. The first question is how to change the student’s major and the second how to change personal information.
11. Ending the Orientation, anywhere during the orientation, moved the student to the ten question quiz. To pass, the student must answer seven questions correctly. The questions were:
 - (1) What is the difference between an online and a telecourse?

- (2) As a returning student, how do you check grades and register for classes?
 - (3) What does it mean if your classes are purged from the system?
 - (4) What is the difference between add/drop and withdrawal?
 - (5) What campus resource is available to help you with Math and English?
 - (6) What are credit hours?
 - (7) What is the minimum number of credit hours needed to be considered a full time student?
 - (8) Where do you go to change your academic program and update personal information?
 - (9) What is Satisfactory Academic Progress?
 - (10) Who will help you plan a course schedule to fit your busy life?
12. After completing the quiz, the student clicked on “submit Quiz.” Then the quiz was automatically scored and the student was taken to a screen with the results and a statement for the student to sign after printing the page. This page was then turned in to student services. The statement read: “I have read and completed the online orientation and passed the quiz, therefore, I am responsible for all of the information included in this orientation.”

Student Activities

Records of student activities provided the following information.

Events

There were eleven for students that were listed as completed by April 15, 2004 with three listed as planned.

Completed events included:

1. A “Welcome Back Bash” with music, pizza and recruitment by student organizations.
2. A 9-11 Memorial Service
3. An Alcohol Awareness Week
4. A Spirit Week
5. “Fall for leadership Conference”
6. A Community Halloween Festival
7. Christmas Adopt A Child
8. A Presentation Luncheon to present money raised during spirit week to a specific student’s cancer recovery.
9. A snack table for night students
10. “Wax Hands”
11. Spring Fling

Planned events were:

1. March of Dimes
2. Blizzard of Bucks Student Event
3. Leadership Awards Luncheon

Student Organizations

A document prepared by student activities listed student organizations and their status.

No membership data was obtained. Listed as “active” as of August 2003 were:

1. American Advertising Federation Student Chapter
2. American Criminal Justice Association Chapter
3. Associated General Contractors Student Chapter
4. Baptist Collegiate Ministry
5. Campus Crusade for Christ
6. The Critics Choice
7. Local Association of Legal Assistants
8. SCC Theater
9. International Student Organization
10. Student Occupational Therapy Association
11. Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society
12. Student Government Association

The following two organizations were added to the list by hand:

13. Muslim Student Association

14. Philosophy Club

Activities listed as “presently indifferent” were:

1. Health Information Management
2. Physical Therapist Assistant Association
3. Spanish Club

Organizations listed as “no longer active” were:

1. African-American Cultural Exchange Club
2. Society of Manufacturing
3. Tech Health Search

Registration Period

Every effort was made by SCC to accommodate student registration. Fall registration period began in late March and continued into the fall semester with late start classes. Late registration for sections in progress was accepted. There was no formal incentive for early registration. However, a weekly meeting to monitor registration progress in comparison to the past year’s data was held by the leadership team. There was a high volume of registration during the period immediately before and after start of fall classes.

Observation

Although the registration processes had been collocated into an attractive facility, they had not been fully integrated. Although the functions were co-located and under the observable supervision of Student Services leadership personnel, they were separate

entities. This had the observable effect of producing separate lines for each function that the student must process through, depending upon their individual needs. If a student requires multiple functions, there are multiple lines in multiple waiting areas. This situation was exacerbated during peak registration periods. Also, issue of the required student identification card and parking permit is in a separate location approximately one mile distant requiring student to go to that location in spite of the significant effort made by SCC to co-locate student services functions.

Research Question 2 - The Student Perspective

What are the expressed issues and needs of new community college students, and to what extent can student orientation programs meet those needs?

The data were collected through two group interviews and thirty-two individual interviews. The sample was broad to represent the many constituencies within a community college. Characteristics of the students who were interviewed were:

- a. Ranged in age from eighteen years old to fifty-two.
- b. Students with GEDs, students without previous degrees or certifications, one with a certificate and a career in a technical field returning to college to pursue a new profession, to a student with a Master's degree returning to college for a professional certificate
- c. Students who were in high school last semester to those graduating at the end of the semester.

- d. Students having only community college experience, those who had previously attended for profit institutions , and those who had attended as many as two major universities without degree completion before coming to the community college.

Affinities, and sub-affinities within those primary affinities, are presented to provide a broad picture of the variations within this population.

In every instance when a student made a reference to a specific name to include those of persons, institutions, places of employment, or individual titles, the name appearing in this study is an alias.

Why Students Say They Start College in the First Place

Pragmatism, Idealism, Trouble From the Beginning, and the Unexpected

The initial question for all interviews was ‘what can you tell me about why you started college?’ The intent was to not only provide an ‘icebreaking’ introduction to the interview but to investigate what motivated students to begin their higher education and provide insight into what may influence retention.

There are many reasons to start the higher education journey, which was clearly expressed in a group interview and reinforced throughout the individual interviews.

“I hate to be blunt like this, but I’m going to be honest. We have different types of people that come to college. We have some people who come to college just for the money, we have some who come to college to further their education, and then some people come to college just because they want to be around people. ...” - Experienced Student

The findings for the affinity of “Why Students Start College in the First Place” are presented in four themes: Pragmatism, Idealism, Trouble from the Beginning, and The Unexpected.

Pragmatism

While there were numerous, individual variations on this theme, the motivation in this affinity is specifically job related. Further, the only motivation appeared to be to gain job skills or to improve the student’s potential in the job market, primarily in a financial sense but sometimes with the intent of creating job security or, more rarely, gaining college credits inexpensively for transfer. This was by far the most common reason cited for starting higher education at a community college.

“Some people come to further their education.... Me, personally I’m here so I can learn to do something else so I can get a better paying job. ... A lot of us that are older, but with the plants and all shut down, we only know one kind of trade, so when we have the opportunity to go back to school to learn something else to better ourselves, that’s why a lot of us are in here.” - Experienced Student

“I’m here to get a new trade. Radiology tech. I got one degree; I’m a certified chef, bored, I’m burn out on that, so I need something else sweet. And I’m retired.”
- Experienced Student

“What makes me come here is that my whole family works in a mill and I’m not going to have to.” - New Student

“Yeah, for security. Just to have a family one day and you don’t have to worry about things. You don’t have to be rich to be happy but everybody wants to be secure.

I’m here to make sure that I get to do what I want to do and not stuck. I have a choice, I’m young, I don’t have children, this is my time. If I don’t do it now, five years from now I’ll be like, ‘oh I should’ve went to school, I should a never quit.’ I want to go ahead and get it done. And when I’m older I can say, this is mine, I say I did this for myself if I didn’t do nothing else. - New Student

“I think the ones right out of high school that come to community college understand that it’s something they need to do but I don’t know if they know the value of it. The ones that are a little older, later twenties, that have been in the work force doing different things understand that I need to get a skill that better prepares myself and prepares me for the future and that they do agree with that. I think age has a lot to do with that also, that’s maturity as a young adult.” - Experienced Student

“Personally for me, I have worked in convenience stores, and waitressed, and textiles, and places like that, and my health and mental problems, emotional problems can’t do that type of work anymore, so I came back to school hoping to get off my disability so I can get a career, a job.” - New Student

“So I could get out of doing labor-type jobs, another reason was I like messing around with computers so I wanted a more technical job. ... I just started getting interested in computers. I went to ITT Tech, I kind of wanted to sign up for their information technology program but I ended up signing up for their computer assisted drafting and design program. I went one semester there. I was going to school in Phoenix at ITT, decided to move back here and looked into this college cause it’s cheaper and I can transfer to universities.” - Experienced Student

“Just been out in the work force for many years and never did go directly to college and wanting to get a higher education. Just realize that I can’t do what I do now forever and wanting a more reputable job, not that the one I have isn’t reputable, but you know you would like to have a career at some point. ... In my eyes, I always think that people who go 9 to 5 and wear a business suit every day, that’s a little more reputable than what I do, I work at night and I work in a restaurant. I don’t want to be doing that when I’m 40 years old.” - New Student

“I started college because nowadays you really can’t get anywhere without a college degree. I applied to State University out of high school and I didn’t get in and thought, well I can go to SCC for a year or so and get my grades up and transfer. Then I decided I didn’t want to go to State University.” - Experienced Student

“I lost my job several years ago during layoffs and have had to take lower paying jobs, and I’m tired of it. ...Today’s life-style requires that more people need an education to get a job. They won’t look at you; banks won’t even look at you for business loans if you don’t have educational background and on the job training. It seems like it’s more of a need and my husband and I want to make a life for ourselves that we don’t have to face that... My husband has also been laid off in the past, and it’s a hard thing to do when you lose two-thirds of your income. So, we just decided it was time. ... I know that if I waited too long to do this then I may have never come back. If I have another child I’ll just stick with some junky job and smile and be happy, stay there for 20 years and pay into a pension ...My husband and I are going to start a business...” - Experienced Student

“Well, I kind of wanted to go earlier but basically because you can’t really get too far in the world without some level of higher education, besides high school.” - Experienced Student

Idealism

Several students gave reasons to start college that were idealistic to some degree. Although these could often be reduced to one of the other themes, the terminology used by the student suggested a more idealistic intent, than was common to the other sub-affinities. “Idealism” normally revolved around building a better life for the student, or more often for the student’s family. The following are some of the most notable comments.

“I came back to school because of my son. He’s doing things and I want him to see how I’ve worked and...Yeah. I mean, he’s a good boy and he makes really good grades and he’s got a good head on his shoulders, but I want to be a positive role model for my son, and coming back to school really helps.” –Experienced Student

“Because I wanted a future. Through high school and all, if you don’t get at least a BA, a four year degree, before you can get any type of job where you can make enough money so that you don’t have to stress constantly about bills and being in debt and stuff. ... Part of the thing was to do your two-year school and then they pay for two years at the four year university. ...one of things is my parents and watching them and seeing how hard they have to work, and then when I got a job myself, you know, looking at people who are a lot older than me and regretting that they didn’t go and focus more on school and stuff. You know, it becomes pretty obvious that you need to do more if you want more.” – Experienced Student

“It has always been a dream of mine, however, having children is a priority with me. I wanted to be home with them. So I decided that would be the most important job that I could have is to be there with my children, although I did work while they were in school, I worked around my children’s schedule. And I supported my husband so he could do well.” - New Student

“Well, I started college because I basically want to have a career. I wanted a set career for myself to have the things that I’ve...I guess I’ve always wanted a house and a family

and something to base it on. My goal, my end goal is to have my own practice as a psychologist.” - Experienced Student

“To better my future. Graduated from high school in '94 and went to a bible based college my first semester. I liked it but the time frame wasn't good for me. My mother had raised me, had passed away, and so had kind of taken my fire away a little bit so I was just not interested in school anymore. So I decided to go out into the real world and get a job, so I started working with the Town School District and just knew that that was not for me. It was just one of those particular positions which a lot of adults are, where you stand still, you feel like you're not moving up, you're not going to get a higher position, and the pay was not that great, and so I said, I just cannot live like this. So I just feel like it should be more competitive and to get a better job I would need something to back me up, which would be a degree, so I decided to come back to school.”

-Experienced Student

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“Initially the reason why I came to school was because I'm the only one in my family that went to college and my mother that raised me was so proud of me, she just really felt like I was going to be somebody and make out of myself so I was doing it to make her proud, cause I mean she did so much for me when she was here as far as raising kids that weren't even hers. So I was doing something that would make her proud of me and when she passed that just kind of, I felt like well I really don't have anything for anybody to be proud of me so there's no need for me to do, I don't care. Cause I was really kind of

already hurt and angry at the same time that she was gone, so that kind of consumed me for those number of years. And then I kept thinking and I guess I had an epiphany and just like, just because she's not here doesn't mean I still could not make her proud of me, so I just kind of decided to go back.” - Experienced Student

“I started college to improve my skills, to do the best than what I'm doing right now, improving, keep on learning. Keep my mind moving.” - Experienced Student

“I needed to get more out of life.” - Experienced Student

Trouble from the Beginning

Since the reason a student starts a college education is indicative of that students underlying motivation and dedication to achieving a higher education, some reasons to begin the educational journey may forecast a short, or at least unfruitful, journey unless there is intervention. This sub-affinity describes the motivation of students who were not internally motivated to succeed in college, even though they were in college.

For the Money

Some students enrolled to collect the financial assistance and use the amount over that paid directly to the institution as personal income. No student, either in the group or individual interviews, admitted to being in this category. However, it was discussed or implied as common knowledge by students.

“You have these grants and stuff that they give you, these loans and stuff that they give you at school for financial aid and some people come just to get that free money that you don’t have to pay back. ...When they come to school and it passes to where they get the money, (note: the date in the semester after which financial aid payments are made passes) then they drop out. So that’s their way to the government’s money. They have to pay it back, but still. I know people who signed up for school, who have came and everything, were deceptive as far as for the loan, for the money to go to school for their classes for tuition and books and they keep the loans that you get, and they quit and they still haven’t paid the money back.” - Group Interview with multiple students commenting

Mom (or Dad) Said So

Coercion, regardless of the parental motivation, is the impetuous to start of community college for some students. Students in this category were, without exception, young. The old saying of ‘you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink’ comes to mind for this sub-affinity of students. Intervention to make the student thirsty for knowledge and modify the students’ motivation to be in college may be a consideration for community colleges.

“You have a lot of us in here, teenagers and stuff like that, you have people that come just because their parents want them to be here, they don’t even want to really be here. ...

Well, not that I don’t want to be here but it’s just that there are so many other things that I’d rather be doing. I had the opportunity to go to Texas to learn a trade that would have

suited me just fine, and that was engine re-building racing engines and their manufacture. And would love to be out there doing that but by my Dad's standards, I couldn't. ... I know an education is important, but somebody pushin' you to do it, you're not going to want to learn." - Experienced Student

"Your parents, mine anyway, especially my Dad. He graduated from 'Southern University,' and that's great and everything, but he's wanting me to be the same person he was and I can't do that. I'm like my dad in a lot of ways, but not like that."

- New Student

"I wanted an associates degree as a paramedic. I graduated high school in December and I really didn't want to come, but momma said if I didn't go that I would never go back."

- New Student

"Because my parents said that you're really not going to get anywhere if you don't have more education, so that kind of...you always hear people talk about later on in life that they wished they'd a gone to college, so I figure I might as well get it now, while I'm young." - Experienced Student

"...there's some people that I just do this and they're the ones that are here because their parents are making them be here, and they ask the same stupid questions over and over in

class, they're not prepared, they ask the questions that the teacher just explained, and I kind of stay away from these type of people because they seem to slow me down.”

- New Student

And, the most succinct: “To please Momma.” Stated by a New Student with a tone that made it clear that she was not pleased to be pleasing Momma.

The Unexpected

The reasons to begin college were widely varied. The most notable are described below. These are an indication of the diversity and uniqueness of community college student, and of the issues with which colleges must work to improve retention.

“I’ve heard people and I’m telling you, this is for real, when I sit and listen to people talking around me and I hear how people talk. I heard a group of girls one day talking in the cafeteria ... she said, I just want to be around cool people. But you should come to school to get right with yourself, you don’t come just to be around people ...but that’s good that she’s here, if that’s the way she wants to look at it, I guess” – New Student

“...for a couple of reasons, first of all to get a degree and to get a better paying job, and second out of spite. Well, not to get too personal, but back a year ago my husband left me. The next day I decided to get financial aid, a month later I got it, the day after that I

applied, and now I'm in. Out of spite to kind of prove to him, 'cut out - I can do without you; I'm better off.' That's my out of spite thing. Kind of motivating actually."

- New Student

"I'd rather be a student than work?" - New Student

"I basically started college because it was more like having to do, not having my parents thinking, well she's just going through high school and just follow our footsteps, so basically I'm trying to go a different way, because my father he went to community college but my mom she only graduated from high school, she was a drop-out. And I felt like if I can show them that I can go a better way then why not take the chance and see if it'll work out." - New Student

"I've been married, I've been taking care of everybody and never stopped to think about myself and what I wanted and what I needed. It was always what my son needed, what my husband needed, what my momma needed, and since I've been taking Betty's class it's made me look into myself and think about what I want and where I want to be and how I want my life to be. And before I didn't do that, I just went with the flow, you know, I went to work, I came home, I paid the bills, I took care of my son, I made sure he did his homework and made good grades, and that was it. Now, like I said, my son's 17, he's fixin' to leave home, there's no more kids, my mom's passed, my oldest brother's

dead, my sister's dead, my dad's dad, my grandmothers, my grandpa. There nobody left for me to take care of, so now it's time I started taking care of myself ...” - New Student

High School's Relevance to Community College Students

A community college is a higher education institution. However, the interviews illustrated the exceptional significance of the secondary school experience on the student's behavior and beliefs after entering community college. High school can produce student issues with which the community college must contend. Under-preparedness has long been recognized in the literature. However, the interviews made clear that there are other issues remaining from high school that the community college must address quickly, if the students are to be successful and retained.

“I don't feel like everybody knows me. Like my instructors, even though I can come after class and ask them things, I don't feel like they know me and I feel like I come here, take my little class, and leave. It's like high school, in a way.” - New Student

Under-Prepared

The literature is clear about the impact of under-preparedness and the necessity of dealing with that situation in the community college. The interviews reinforced the literature on this point.

“... lack of preparation, like not being prepared for the amount of work that was done, the way things were going to be handled. Coming out of public schools sometimes not the most adequate transfer from a public high school to a college level course in one semester. The English class hit me pretty hard because I finished high school in December, started here in January, and found that a lot of what was being taught in English class in high school was not being used here in the college level. It was things that I learned a few years back and had trouble remembering it.... So I think it lies mainly in the hands of the high schools. I think high school’s too easy, it’s too laid back and I got slack, and then when I hit this I had to try and catch up, so to speak.”

- Experienced Student

“I was not a good student in high school, mainly because I just didn’t care. All I remember the most is struggling with everything, even the simplest math I had a hard time with, and I don’t know if it’s because I really had a hard time, or if it’s just that I didn’t care, or didn’t want to apply myself enough. You know, it’s been so long, all I remember is I hated, so the fear of going back to school and not being able to do it, it scared me because I didn’t want proof that I was stupid.” - New Student

“I wasn’t very good with grades in high school.” In her first semester, this student described her performance as, “Barely passing” and when asked if she knew why she was barely passing, she replied, “Not really.” – New Student

“Because I wasn’t prepared in high school for what they’re asking for me now. Like my English papers, I never heard of a thesis statement in high school, or how to write a paper in the correct way. I was always taught you gotta have five sentences and you try to stretch them out as long as can. ... And I’ll tell you something, this is really sad, like I messed up on my paper because I didn’t know what a dangling modifier is, you know. In English we never did any that, we just read books. ... a lot of people that I’ve know that have came to school said that they weren’t prepared at all and they were barely passing their classes or either they failed one and they’re repeating. ... I took AP (Advanced Placement) classes and those were supposed to help you for college but I don’t know. Psychology ... I remember everything from the class but the exam’s so hard. I don’t think it helped for college though cause I haven’t studied for that class either. Well maybe it’s something they need to start teaching in high school or something, I don’t know what’s going on, but like I did good in high school, I got a 3.0, or maybe it was just too easy.” - New Student

And the prepared:

One of the students was confident that he had proper preparation in high school.

“... in high school and all, they’ll tell you that if you go to any college you can’t joke around and you have to focus from day one. You know we were in high school, we didn’t know. I think they probably, I realize now that they probably told you that so you would be more focused on what you’re doing in high school so you’d be as prepared as

you can, and when you got to college... I feel like I was pretty prepared to do what was necessary.” - Experienced Student

The High School Mentality in the Wrong Place

The mindset that a student has for high school does not appear to be accurate for the community college environment and appears to have a negative impact on the success of students if that mindset is not modified. New students must learn quickly that college is not high school. They must do college level work and meet college standards. The logical place to do that is in an orientation. It also appears that the high school influence does not abate with age, if there is a long delay before college. The following stories are illustrative of the issues arising from applying a high school mindset to the community college.

“I guess in high school you’re used to the teacher helping you along with the stuff, letting you know, like basically helping you out with things. Like if you were absent, they’d come to you and say, you need to turn this work in and you need to turn this work in, but in the college environment it’s all on you and if you don’t have that basis of being able to be self-reliant, then you’re not going to succeed. I don’t think at all, because a lot of it is self-discipline. I was used to a teacher coming up and telling me, look you need to turn this in because you were absent the other day. How’s this going to work on a college when the teacher, to a point, doesn’t really care if you’re in class or not.” - Experienced Student

A 43-year-old male, “Cause this exam thing is also new to me too, because back when I was going to high school, some years and years ago, when you had an exam it wasn’t emphasized as much, it didn’t seem like the pressure was there as much as it does nowadays. It seems like there’s going to be a lot of pressure.” - New Student

“Some of the instructors are vague in their description of the work, but this is college - this is not high school, you’ve got to get it for yourself. If you got to get it, you got to get it yourself. They’re going to give you the information that you need to get this knowledge, but it’s up to you, it’s totally up to you, whether you get this knowledge or not. And if you take the attitude that they’re here to teach me, no, they’re here to instruct you on how to get this knowledge. Young kids, they’ve been led all through high school by the hand. The whole time they was in high school you do it this way and if you do this, that, and the other, this is the result that you’re going to have. When they get to college it’s like a major jar to their system cause the teachers really aren’t here just for them, they’re here for the whole majority that’s in that classroom, and like I say it’s like a business. Then some students feel like they’ve been picked out to be picked on. Well, you don’t have to be smart with me. No, this is not high school: you’ve got to remember that.

And the young girl that sits in my class, all they do, they just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. So, I’m asking questions because I really need this knowledge, I wouldn’t have took this class if I didn’t need this knowledge. I need to know how to write notes again because I haven’t took notes in, what, 25/26 years. I need to remember how to do all this

stuff again. Because you're getting the attitude of Ms. Bad and want to bust out of the room or give smart comments, man, leave that at home, I don't need that." - Experienced Student

"It really puts responsibility on me. I've always been a responsible adult but it made me really look back and see what my responsibilities was because it's totally different from high school. In high school you kind of have your teachers lay down the assignment or homework, they're kind of standing on me to get this turned in. With this they gave you a little more leeway, you were kind of left out there to fend for yourself and I've come to realize that basically only the fittest will survive, so you kind of have to fend for yourself. If you're late with your assignment you're not going to have the professor there holding your hand saying, you need to get this in. I mean they might remind you but it's totally different from high school. You don't have anybody here baby-sitting you. You're left to do the work and they're there to present the course to you and hopefully you're going to get through that course." - Experienced Student

"In high school you had to go to school, in college you don't have to go, the professors get paid whether you show up or not, and that's one tough thing right there. People are pushing you in high school to go graduate high school, and that's a big step, but nobody really pushes in college. My parents did, yes, but it's a different push, high school you have to go, college you don't." - New Student

“Basically my first semester, I had a little trouble in math but I basically passed all the rest of my classes. I kind of like fooled around, and when I say fooled around I mean basically, cause it’s something new to me, like not coming to class. They give us three days, so not coming to class or not filling the note to coming to class or getting bored in the classes. So, that’s what I did my first semester, but I ended up passing all my classes except math. I mean, you get some of your days you’ll be like, well I don’t want to go to school today and then when you’ve done that so many times the important stuff comes up, I mean you might have to go to the hospital, you might have some business that comes up and interferes with school.

But, I mean I’m passing, I can say I’m passing one out of four of my classes.” (in reference to the current semester as opposed to the first semester)

- New Student

“I’m kind of shocked. Because where I’m from I’m used to seein’ people walk around with cowboy hats on and wrangler jeans, not baggy pants and rags, and...I’m not used to that. It’s a culture difference.” - New Student

“It’s a lot harder than high school.” - New Student

Student Maturity, or the Absence Thereof

Experienced students often mentioned how much they had matured while in college, and many older students noted the immaturity of young students. There was a

similarity between this category and the high school mentality category. In some instances the content of the interview evidenced the immaturity of the student.

“By me being a freshman in college, it’s like we expect it to be more like high school and when you come to college it’s not more like high school because they feel that you should be more responsible and everything. But it’s not like that, we’re just coming from high school, so it’s kind of going to be like hard to get used to. We have to get in a certain routine and I feel like they should make a program here at SCC to have like all the freshman, well, let’s go by this routine for the freshmen, let’s do this for the freshmen. But it’s not like that, it’s kind of like hard on us and I think that’s why we have so many freshmen will be like after the second semester I don’t want to go to no more college.” - New Student

“It was not good. I didn’t do too well. I was going full-time my first semester and I got two A’s and two F’s, but I actually really never came to school practically. I never came to school much, I was into the whole partying thing, just out of high school and I was 18 years old. I could go to this club and do this and school wasn’t very high on my priorities I think I would have like to have taken a year off before I started college because I feel like I wasn’t mature enough.” - Experienced Student

“I took a semester off after high school, caught up on my sleep.” – New Student

“I matured. I matured a lot mentally. It kind of just happened.” - New Student

Study – Why? How?

The lack of knowledge about how to study, much less the understanding of the importance of doing so was either specifically stated by the student or evidenced throughout the context of the interview. Not knowing how to study was very common. This appears to be a major problem that the community college must confront if students are to be successful.

“I had to re-evaluate how I approached the course and approached the work, and how much time I spent doing each assignment. It was mostly the methods. I had to spend a little more time with it than I was used to spending on schoolwork. Just force myself to do it. It wasn’t easy; it was hard for me to do because I was one of the guys who breezed through high school. It didn’t take a whole lot of effort to get through and I graduated with a B average in high school and then coming here I had to put a lot more effort out than I was used to doing.” - Experienced Student

“I’ve never studied a day in my life. I had a 3.0 (in high school). Barely passing now (in college). I try to study and I can’t. Well I can but I get so distracted easy and I study the wrong way, because even if I do study I still fail or do bad or... Is there a wrong way to study? Well, I guess I just haven’t found what works for me.” - New Student

“In high school I did not study at all. I studied some if I really, really needed it. If I really didn’t know it, I would study, but that was about 30 minutes. I did not study at all, but now I study more because like in English, we go over the basic stuff but like run-on sentences and stuff like that. That’s what I really need help in, cause I write a sentence and it sounds right to me but it’s not right. So, now I’m learning about correct grammar. In high school, they taught us that but they didn’t go into just like details about all that. They just went through it, in one class you go through this, the next class you go through something else.” - New Student

“I mean I grew up in a time when women didn’t think of getting a career because you got married, had kids, stayed home, whatever. So I never really took school that seriously. So the fear of not knowing how to study and how to apply myself, that was one of the biggest fears.” - New Student

Speaking about whether he knows how to study, “I’m going to say no. I’m going to have to say I’m okay, I’m okay because if I think I know it, I’m not going home and open that notebook if I think I know it. Where if it comes to, we got a test tomorrow and she throws the test in front of me, well guess what, I don’t know it. I think I should have studied. I do that all the time, I mean that’s not something I do just one time, I do it all the time. If I think I know the stuff I just say, well okay and leave it alone and just hope the next day when they give out a test or quiz that I know it, like I said I did.” - New Student

And from those who do know how to study:

“I guess my experience might not be the same as some of the other students in the honors program, but I can just tell you about my experiences. Smaller classroom. You seem a lot of the same students so you’re able to build a relationship with them. Discussions, being treated more like an adult, I guess, in the sense that it’s not a continuation of the high school experience, that you’re able to throw back ideas and bounce it off each other and just talk. It’s not so regimented; it’s more of a creative process. I love that.” - New Student

“I usually, well, right now I’ve been trying to study by myself even though I said I do study in groups. I’ve been trying to study by myself and I make sure I’m in a place where not a lot of racket is going on. I study for about two hours. Sometimes I record myself to study, like if I’m studying for history or psychology.” - New Student

Age – The Issue That Is Not an Issue

Age, Perceived a Barrier to Starting

Many of the older students, one of which was only 29 years old, expressed a fear of starting college since their age would preclude them from ‘fitting in,’ cause them to stand out, or be isolated. However, after starting and being in classes for an unspecified time period age as a barrier, and that fear, dissipated. This was one of the common fears or concerns about starting college expressed by students that were either starting or returning to college after being in the workplace or having been primary care providers to

children. Additionally, some young students spoke indirectly about their hesitation or doubts about working with older students.

“In the beginning, I was very nervous. I felt, will I be accepted, how’s this going to be with me sitting in a class perhaps with a lot of 20 year old kids, are they going to accept me and take me seriously. ... I haven’t had one bad experience, not one student made me feel like I didn’t belong in the classroom. So, I’ve been very lucky.” - New Student

“A preconceived notions of being too old to go back to school and what campus life was like compared to what it was like when I was 18 and fresh out of high school and now. I think those were my biggest fears.” - Experienced Student

“Actually I just thought maybe the folks, and what not, you know the kids was a lot more intelligent than they are now. You know they’ve learned technology.” - New Student

“Well, being an older student. I felt that uh, I was a little nervous about that...starting again, but it was something I knew I had to do because I recently separated with my husband and still feel that I’m young enough to get an education and better my life that way.” - New Student

The Resolution of the Age Fear

When students observed that there were numerous older students in addition to themselves and that the interaction with younger students was largely positive, the fear they had had of being too old to start college was resolved and ceases to be a negative issue. Although many students stated that this fear had been a major issue for them as they waited to start college, none of the students retained this fear after a relatively short time in classes. This is a major student concern that could be easily resolved at an orientation. If treated proactively, it would become one less anxiety for a student to confront.

“Probably the age thing is the only thing that would cause people not to fit in, but there’s a lot of people older than my age and younger.” -Experienced Student

“I was very happy to see so many people closer to my age in classes. That was another fear that I had going into it, that I was going to be in school with a bunch of kids, basically. Not that I have anything with going to school with kids, but it was nice to see so many other people my age that I could relate to in a lot of different ways.” - New Student

“They were very accepting of me, I was surprised. I felt like they would look at me and think, oh she’s just an old woman, but they were all...of course I’m a very outgoing

person, so I just talked to them, so they, yeah, they all treated me very well.” - New Student

“I found that most of the students in my classes are not any younger than I am. Whether they finished high school and went straight to work or started out maybe at one time and came back many years later, I thought the first day I came to school I was going to be the oldest person in class. Today everybody was going to be young, out of high school, they don’t even have to pay their own car payment yet, but I found that most of them are in my age group or older and have children. I found it very easy.” - Experienced Student

“First of all, they’re amazed at my age, which is always a good thing (She was mistaken for less than 36 years old), but not only that I don’t see an age difference. We get along and we work together on the same level and age is not a factor now where it used to be, again my preconceived notion, age is not a fact. I don’t even look at it when I’m in the classroom setting with other students.” - Experienced Student

“I didn’t until I started and saw a lot of people my age in school with me, and realized that going into it with a different mentality, going into with the knowledge that I knew I could do this, it’s what I wanted to do, and I was there because I wanted to be as opposed to this is what I had to do. - New Student

Differences in Age Groups

The ability to work together in class does not mean that there are not significant differences in the perspectives of the young and older students. There were multiple views of this reality and students must deal with this issue in the classroom. This could be a good topic to begin to resolve in an orientation program.

“Just the same kinds of problems going in, you know, family to take care of and just all kinds of outside stuff that goes on that... Younger kids have their own set of baggage that they bring in, but people more my age... And then there’s also inter-reacting with all of the kids that are there who are younger and seeing the struggles that they go through also that I can relate to. ...they’ve got different problems. They’re more worried about the boyfriends and being able to go out and have a good time as opposed to dealing with family because they don’t have that pressure yet.” - New Student

“... age differences. There’s a lot of older people in the classroom. Well, I’m sittin’ there bored, but they don’t understand it, so we have to, we have to wait for them to catch.” - New Student

“...for instance, in my psychology class, which I just left, there’s this one kid and he looks like he’s straight out of high school, and he just cuts up like the whole class with his little jokes, and sometimes he is funny, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but it’s just disruptive sometimes.” - New Student

“...you do it everyday, it comes easy for you because you do it over and over and over. Me, I haven’t did any of this stuff since I left school, especially math. The stuff I did in math was adding and subtracting and multiplying, the other stuff I never used since I got out of high school. It’s harder and when you’re older. It’s harder because you’re not sitting in a classroom thinking about, well I’m going to ace this test and then go home and skateboard. When you’re my age you’re sittin’ in class thinking about am I going to have money to get to school the rest of the week? Am I going to have money for food? Am I going to have money to pay my bills? Am I going to have money to buy my medicine? Did I forget my doctor’s appointments? You know, you’ve got fifty thousand different things going through your head.” - New Student

“Well, when the young kids talk about Spring Break, what they gonna do, how much fun they gonna have, that’s when I feel more out of place. When I do fit, I feel like I could give them some knowledge on some experience on just life in general, and also, as far as my own studying, I feel like I’m getting it to the best that I can, you know I feel real confident about what I’m doing, it makes me feel good.” - New Student

“You do see a lot of people from your own graduation year and everything, but there’s so many different age groups. Some classes will have people still in high school taking college classes and there’ll be older people, like in their 40’s, I think. I remember in my first math class there was a lady in her 60’s coming back for math class. I guess because

I'd never seen anybody in their 60's back in a math class. I just kind of wondered what exactly they're going for, like if they were continuing or going back to get a degree."

- Experienced Student

Benefits of Diversity of Age

As with any aspect of diversity, there are benefits from having both young and older students in the same classroom. Some students recognized the benefits of diversity of age in the classroom, although the overall context of the interviews implied that it was not always a conscious thought. It appears that having older students in a class can serve as good examples for younger students, even if those older students have to take time to refresh themselves on what the recent high school graduates know. It is also noted that older is a relative term, depending on the point of reference of the observer.

"It's like having my mom in class. Cause there's like a 40 year old woman, and always helping me out, so that is kind of good too, because I like, you know." - New Student

"I've got a lot of older people in my classes, like in my reading class I have a gentleman, he's 74 years old and he's just the sweetest man. He's a black guy and he's just very friendly, he's really easy going, and to me if a man his age can come back to school, then I can. If a man 74 years old has the mental capacity of doing this, then, I'm 35, I'm going to have the mental capacity to do this." - New Student

“...talking to some of my classmates and how life could be a little worse, like the parents that have to come to school because their jobs are not going so well. They get off work, come to school, go home, take care of the kids, and come here. I mean, that’s motivation enough for anybody, but really get your act together, choose now what you want to do for the rest of your life rather than make mistakes.” - Experienced Student

A nineteen year old in reference to working with older students, “...I guess there’s a difference but when it comes to getting the work done, there’s not that big of a difference, it’s not that noticeable a thing. Well, you have to realize that it must be important to have a degree at their, in their 30’s or 40’s they’re trying to come back and get it to get ahead, but sometimes you have to do sharing because some haven’t been to school in so long they don’t know, they don’t remember some of the stuff, but usually it’s fine, they’re pretty nice. You figure that they are related to the real world or what their job does. They are like, ‘I use this, learn this cause we do it at my job.’ This is important because of that. You understand the reason is to learn it better. It seems like there’s more of a point to it, like this isn’t wasting your time and you’re learning something that is useful.” - Experienced Student

Other Concerns and Fears of New Students

In addition to the concerns or fears of new students based on age, three other major concerns were voiced. These concerns were common to both the new students and the

experienced students, regardless of age. Also, these fears, as listed below, were more pervasive.

Fear of Academic Failure

Not being successful academically was the concern or fear most frequently expressed by students and was in the context of both as a barrier to starting college and a major fear of being academically successful in college. For those students who were academically successful after beginning college, the fear was usually abated by either success on a major examination or grades at the end of the first semester. The result for many of the successful students was significant level of confidence in their ability to succeed in college. For those students who were having academic trouble, the fear remained and the frustration was often clear.

This study did not address the number of students who may have been influenced to drop out of college due to academic issues. However, the fear of academic failure was common, and coupled with the issue of not knowing how to study, academic success or failure is clearly a major concern for community college retention.

“You know, I wasn’t sure if I probably going to make it through this year, but I probably am, this semester, excuse me. Now that I’m here and making good grades, I’ve already decided to come back for the Fall.” - New Student

“I was just afraid of failing, coming in here and it just being over my head, and not having the tutors and teachers and stuff, like in high school that would be there to help

you out, and not have another student, friends and all to help you if you had a question and stuff to figure it out. That probably was the main thing, just coming in and it being too much. ... Right, when I got that for the first semester, when we got the actual report cards sent home and I looked at it, it was like I believe I can get through four years of this.” - Experienced Student

“I think when I saw that, even though some time had gone since high school, that I started getting good grades the first semester and I saw really I can do this. I thought forever that I wouldn’t be able to. You know, so much time, your brain forgets, you don’t think you know how to study anymore, all the math you don’t think you understand how to do it anymore, and not realizing that it all came back pretty quickly and that was even better motivator to do well.” - New Student

“Well, unless my 40 year old brain would be able do it. ... At first it was a little bit of a concern that maybe I wasn’t as young as I used to be and that my mind might not be able to think, but I’m a straight A student.” - New Student

“I’ve just really enjoyed it. Learning again, getting my mind working again, applying myself to something, learning new things, meeting new people, it’s been great, I’ve really enjoyed it.

I think when I got my first math test back. Me and math have never gotten along and I was really, really nervous about it and I got it back and I got 100 on it. It was easy

math, but it was still an accomplishment for me to see a 100 on a math test, which is something I've never... So that really made me happy. It made me realize that I really can do this. Like I said, even though it was a simple math test, it was still showing me that if I apply myself I can do this, and I know I can do it well. Cause I was afraid that I was going to get bad grades and be a failure and have to take things over and over again, and just something as simple as getting a 100 on a test made me realize, yeah I can really do this and I can do it well. ...

I think that, well it's a combination of all that, but it's also the fact that when I'm listening I really can understand what's going on. I don't know exactly how to describe what I'm trying to say, but... I know that I can learn this, whatever's being taught to me I know that I can learn it, I know I can apply it in my everyday life because, once again, that was one of my fears, that I was going to go and I was going to listen and nothing was going to absorb. I wasn't going to be able to get it. I wasn't going to be able to do anything. But now, when I got there and realized after my first few days of being in class that I understood what that instructor was talking about and I was retaining that and I could apply it, that's when I realized yeah, I can really do this and I'm comfortable with it because I know that I can do it, I'm not going to be a failure at it.

And it all once again goes back to my mind frame where, I guess, because I'm older and I'm doing this because I want to, as opposed to having to go to school, I know I can do it and succeed at it.” - New Student

“After the end of my first semester, my grades, that I could do it, and I did have the discipline to turn off the TV and actually study and know what was important. I got my priorities straight basically.” - New Student

Being in the Wrong Course of Study or Profession

Related to academic success was the concern for choosing the wrong course of study. Students often expressed this in terms of spending years and money to become qualified to do something they will not want to do once the student joined the workforce profession they studied. Some students feared making the wrong career choice. Students often have no experience and little knowledge of the profession they are studying to join.

From a group interview with three students talking about their major,

“When you get out of high school and you decide on a major, mine is radiology, but it’s scary to go to classes and stuff and when you get ready to go into clinical courses, how are you going to be completely sure that’s what you want. You don’t want to go to school and waste your time for something you think you want to do and when you get it and change your mind.” ...

You use what works to get there and then you might not want to be that and then you have to back track and take more math or another English, so if you’re locked in and you really don’t know if you’re going to come out knowing if that’s what you want to do.

I agree with that a little bit. The part I don't agree with is like me, my major is paralegal, I'm thinking about changing because I've talked with a couple of paralegals and I've went and talked to lawyers, and now I don't think that's what I want to do so I'm going to change my major. I just think if you're really not sure, find somebody in the field and ask them questions, go to work with them and stay with them for an hour or two and see what they do." - Experienced and New Students

"Well the only doubt that I might have is that I'll get into my major and I'll be at my first job and I won't like it or something like that. That's the only fear that I have, but I don't have any doubt that I won't succeed. As long as that financial aid keeps picking up the tab, I should be fine. ... Because, well this, actually a surgical technician major, something I don't know a lot about, I just read up on it, found it interesting. There's a lot of other people that are surgical tech majors, but I've never had any experience, anything like that, so it's kind of scary knowing that I might be in the operating room, the first surgery, and I'm standing there for six hours and be like, oh my God, I just spent three years for this and I hate it." – New Student

In reference to overcoming this fear, "Well, to know that that is definitely what I want to do, so I guess more information, more access to surgical tech, maybe a surgical tech or nursing or LPN; like actually come speak to us maybe. I'm still in my curriculum studies. I'm still in my English and Psychology and stuff like that, so I'll be starting all those next semester, but I do have in my Psychology, I have to do a career

interview where I have to interview somebody in my chosen field. So that'll actually be the first time that I will speak to a surgical tech. - New Student

Paying for College

Financial issues were a frequently stated concern. This is even more significant since SCC was located in a state that provided significant levels of financial aid to virtually all residents with funding from gaming profits. In this situation, financial aid appeared to make attending college possible, but not easy. Also, often the major concern was financial commitments other than direct college costs.

“Well, we were always a two-income family, and now that I’m in school... Actually I got laid off, so I was on unemployment, and that’s when I decided to go back to school because I realized that if I didn’t do something I was just going to keep going to these jobs that ended up where I’d be laid off, or I’d have to find a new job because they closed down or whatever. I worked in a lot of small businesses, is where I worked, in the office. And now we’re down to a one-income family, unemployment is running out, so it’s just a matter of having to re-juggle the finances in order to make it on a one income family, or if I can find a job, at least a part-time job.”- New Student

“At first I was like, how am I going to pay for it. I didn’t want to take out no loans. So I filled out the FAFSA and I got a full pay over it.” - New Student

“The only thing I was worried about was money. I was in a single parent home and they didn’t ask who was going to be able to pay for it. ... I got the lottery tuition. ... I pay for my own books. - New Student

“Definitely money, because all the schools I really wanted to go to they were out-of-state, and even with the scholarships and grants that I had, they were still very expensive, so that was my biggest concern.” - New Student

“It seems to me that you either have to be on or below the poverty level to be able to get a lot of help. I mean, yeah, everybody can get lottery money, but if it wasn’t for aid I wouldn’t be here at all. I get a Pell grant and they take care of everything. Actually, the Pell Grant gave me so much that I didn’t need the lottery.” - New Student

“It’s (financial aid) really big. I’m on my disability and I’m on Medicaid, but my rent’s \$400 a month. My check’s not but \$652. I get a Pell grant from school, they pay my tuition, my books, everything, and I did get a little refund check from them for like two hundred something dollars after everything had been deducted. So that helped.” - New Student

“Absolutely, we’ve gone to financial aid, yes, absolutely, and they’ve been great. Without that I couldn’t have done this, there’s no way I could have done this without

financial aid. So that has been a blessing, and then with the state lottery, that'll come into play and that's going to help a lot too." - New Student

Access: The Issue that was Not Mentioned

Although there were many issues concerning the start of students' higher education experience, not one mentioned any doubt about access to higher education before they started college. Although this was not an issue addressed by this study, the following student response is of interest. During the interview the topic turned to why the student, who was over 40 years old, knew she could start higher education.

"Because I know that you can go to school, it's just America. If you want to go to school, you can go if you're 80 if you can pay for it. I have to say, lottery, here we've got the lottery, too is a big deal, it was advertised on TV and all that. So, I knew that I could, financially probably at least have some financial aid to go towards that, and now that I'm doing well I might even be able to, hopefully some day, God-willing, get a scholarship or two. So, I always knew that I could go back to school at any time, maybe I just didn't believe in myself so much. I believed it was there if I wanted to, but I didn't, you know, now I do." - New Student

College vs. Work and Children

Work and Study

Students were definite that work and children impacted their studies. However, some students were dedicated to gaining a college education and finding ways to accommodate work and college by working a wide range of jobs.

“Wal Mart, I work there full-time. ... I don’t have as much time to study. ... Stay up late (to study).” - New Student

“I’m actually a part-time nanny. Full-time student, part-time nanny. It’s a single dad. He has one boy, he’s actually older, he’s not a child, he’s actually fourteen years old, but his dad goes out of town a lot and he needs somebody there. I’m more like a domestic assistant, I keep the house going, I keep up with the housework, I make sure that he’s okay, check his homework, take him wherever he needs to go. I’m there every night a lot.” ... How did you locate the job? “I guess he put up the flier, it was actually in the commissary right across here and I just happened to walk through there one day and looked over and I saw it and took his number and called him and he hired me that day.”

- Experienced Student

“I work a lot. Both of my jobs are part-time. I work here at night part-time and sometimes when this guy needs me I work Monday, Wednesday, and Friday so I only go to school Tuesday and Thursday, I work part-time for him. I run a lathe machine, a drill

press, and an injection motor machine. ... (Student is also a member of the security force at SCC) ... You just apply for the job and you don't have to have any previous training."

- Experienced Student

"I'm a customer service representative at a bridal shop. Work about 18 (hours per week). (Affect on studies) Well, when I was hired I was able to tell them what days I could work and what days I couldn't, so I've tried to schedule my work schedule around the days that I do go to school, that way I have more time to do what I need to do for school. ... Well, I think it affects it because I don't have, I mean I don't if a lot, but I don't have as much time as I would like to sit down and do my studies and things like that. If I didn't work, I would definitely, probably be making all A's because I would have all this time to really sit down and concentrate and study and not worry, oh I have to go to work today at such and such a time and I can't study tomorrow because I have to work all day. So, I think that working conflicts with school a lot." - Experienced Student

"I work as a waitress. I work like four nights a week. I did work at a store before that and it was like, I'd go out of class and go straight to work. Sometimes it's hard to get all my work done. Sometimes I'm staying up rather late to make sure I get work done for the next day's class. Sometimes when we're really busy, sometimes after cleaning up, we don't even get out of there like until 2:30. I usually have those nights before my 9:30 class. Basically with my job, not a lot of time, finding just enough time just to do my job and school work." - Experienced Student

“I think that a lot of students realize that everybody else has lives outside of SCC and that it does come with challenges. You have some people that I have come into contact with or have met other classmates, they have full-time jobs, kids to take care of, and it’s hard because college is really a job in itself and it comes really, really challenging at times. I think that’s why I have met a few good friends here because a lot of us can relate that it is tough here, it is very tough. It’s not like this is an easy school, for it to be a community college some of the classes are very challenging, so that’s why I feel I have related a lot with some of the people that I have come into contact with, and I’ve become good friends with them too.

I have to budget my time in between studies and try to separate work with school. When I have my school time, it’s my school time. When I’m at work, I’m at work. It’s been kind of challenging because a lot of times my weekends are not free, I don’t have the luxury of going out and doing anything on the weekends but a lot of times are spent studying. I’ve taken the bitter with the sweet because I know that comes with the territory, but it’s been kind of challenging at times.” - Experienced Student

“And now, here, I work four nights out of the week. I’m a host at the Steak House.”

- Experienced Student

“If you got these hours, they’re counting on you to come in, you’ve got to take the time out of your study time, you’ve got to readjust your schedule from what it originally was.”

- Experienced Student

Priorities

(During a comment about instructors providing advance notice of activities outside of class time) “That way I can let people know, like my job, let them know that I’m going to come in a certain time. They are working with a lot of people’s schedules for school, but I told them, if you can’t work with my school schedule I’ll have to quit this job. (The employer works with me) every once in a while. Sometimes they give me a hard time. I mean they get all grouchy and such and might write you up for it for coming in late. But I told them that my education was more than that job.” - New Student

“Basically if I tell my supervisor I have a test next Friday, she’s like, ‘do you want to be off that day?’ And I’m like, yeah, I need to be off that day. She says, everybody that works there, they’re pretty much from ages 16-20, so she’s used to scheduling people around their...she’ll just sign up somebody else to work, except the weekend when she just schedules you.” - New Student

“Knowing that I’ve got dates to complete this assignment, trying to work at the same time, trying to keep in tab with my kids who are also in school. You know, it was kind of like I had a lot on the table when I first started, things are getting better now. Because

I'm adjusted to it more. When I first started I didn't know what to expect and I had things coming at me, and my daughter had surgery, and there was just a lot of chaos. (So, how did you get to the point where you were adjusted to it?) By coming every day, paying attention, my grades give me confidence that I can do it." - New Student

"I work several jobs. I work-study at SCC, and I also work part-time at SCC, the college that I attend. Outside of those, I'm very involved in a lot of activities and things on the weekends.

Phi Theta Kappa meets once a week on Monday at 4:00 and that conflicts with my work schedule so I haven't yet been able to attend a meeting. Student Government Association meets on Friday afternoon at 1:00 and by the time I'm finished with school and work on Friday afternoon, I'm kind of looking forward to going home because at 6:00 I do private tutoring for high school students at a nearby town, so my time frame is not really wide open. And then every other weekend I tutor outward-bound students at SCC.

It doesn't impact negatively on my studies. Somehow I find the time to fit it all. When I'm at school, I'm focused on school and I'm doing school activities. My work, I don't have to bring home. I work in the business office and doing work-study, so there's nothing that has to be taken home that conflicts with my work schedule, so when I get off work I'm going home to do my studies.

I've always had two jobs because free time to me was just wasted time. That's why I always look for another part-time job. But I guess it was learned, just priority setting.

(Other activities?) Let's see. I am the president of my missionary society of my local chapter at church, so that consumes a lot of weekend time as well. So, I'm very busy and have two teenage children. I like to do it. I would imagine there is a little stress there, but... It's not detrimental to my studies or my health. ...

Out of all the classes I've taken I've only missed two and those were due to an illness with my mother, so I'm very attentive in classes, I'm very involved in classes, participation, ..." - Experienced Student in final semester

Using the course scheduling.

"I think that's one of the mottos of one of the commercials I saw, it's the college that works for you. I guess you don't have to plan your schedule around the college, the college plans the schedule around you, so you can take the classes when you want to and not worry about all the other stuff and that you can work to. They give you core classes and then right what you want to do, there's not all this other stuff you have to take like fine arts at a four year college." - Experienced Student

Children and Study

Children also have a definite affect on students in college. Just as many students did with their work obligations, many students learned to attend college and care for

children. They found ways to accommodate both in their schedules that were often unique to the student's individual situation.

"I wouldn't have time. I'm divorced and now remarried with a child and there are other responsibilities and things that you have to do and "I'm sorry, I can't cook you dinner, I have to study" doesn't really fly too well when you have a house full of family looking at you. Sometimes they say the classes are more focused around working adults but it's not necessarily true when you get in and start looking at schedules. If you have a job from 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning till 5:30 in the afternoon, how can you get to class if your class starts at 5:00 or 4:30, and bosses aren't so lenient to let you go, so that you go an education to leave them either. They don't want you to branch out and leave, they want you to stay where you're at. In Town, with the textiles closing, and the jobs not so great at times, it makes it harder for people who don't have a strong educational background to get into better paying jobs. So, they take less paying jobs, they work in bars, they work in restaurants, where the hours again are not fit with you...if you work till 5:00 am in the morning you're supposed to take a two hour nap before you go spend all day at school and it's hard to do." - Experienced Student

"Kids, you've got to make sure they're cared for while you're gone." –Experienced Student

In a group interview with two students speaking, "...you're an adult, you have more responsibilities. Like me, I'm a single mom; I have to take care of everything. I have to take care of all the bills, the cooking, the cleaning, and my son helps but he's a boy, he don't get into washing dishes and vacuuming and all that stuff. I make him and he does it, but cooking and stuff, it's hard. Like when I'm studying, I have books laid out on the coffee table, and I have cooking going, and as I'm running back and forth I'm studying and I'm cooking at the same time. I'm multi-tasking all the time. And it's hard to comprehend when you have to sit down and start something and have to jump up and, like she said cook, fold clothes, or whatever, and then you jump back and you don't comprehend everything you read." -Experienced Students

"This has been the best experience, really, in my life. Apart from having children, that to me was the most wonderful thing that happened in my life is having my children, but second to that would be my education here at SCC." - New Student

"I was afraid that I would get in here and either I would hate it or, you know things happen at home anyway and what if you don't have the time; what if my kid gets sick, is my instructor going to understand it if I can't come to class that day because my day care says they can't keep a sick child. I've been fortunate but I'm also honest with my instructors too, when I call and say I can't come today, my child's sick, and I've never been penalized for it. And I come to class when I'm supposed to, I don't miss assignments, so I have instructors who work really well with me." - Experienced Student

“My son grounds me if I don’t make good grades. He turns it around, I used to ground him and wouldn’t let him watch TV if he made a bad grade and he does it to me. He says you can’t use the telephone.”- Experienced Student

Not limited to mothers.

A divorced father, “I split the time; like I get my kids every other weekend or Wednesdays, so what I do on the weekends I have them...I get ‘em only eight days a month and on the weekends I have them...I put the school on the back burner, because I focus on my kids. I know you’re not supposed to...they say you’re not supposed to, but when you get ‘em eight days a month, you want your kids to know you were there. Eight days ain’t much when you’re talking 30 days a month. ... you have to have balance. We have fun though. I mean, my son he likes to see me with a book bag on my back. He likes that. He’s going to school and I’m going to school. He does his homework and I do mine. Yeah, we do fine. Like a little activity we got going.” –Experienced Student

Children and the Guilt

The mothers who were interviewed were successful in finding ways of providing for the care of their children while attending college. However, many of the mothers talked about their feelings of guilt about the time they dedicated to college and, therefore, away from their children.

“When I come home and try to do my homework, my boys will want to talk and stuff. I’ve got wait till I can get them situated before I can start doing my work or what ever. And you feel guilty. This was something I chose to do; get married, have my children, and then go to school. It’s not what they chose. And after being at home with them for four years, there’s a lot of guilt because it takes so much time away from them and they’re having to deal with it as much as I am.” -Experienced Student

A forty-three year old woman: My problems? Kids. We’ve got kids and they always want help with their children, watching the grandchildren, and dealing with that. And then money, of course, not working right now because I’m going to school. The budget is tight, so you’ve got to figure that out and struggle with that. And a lot of it’s just my kids are so used to my always being there to help them. Now that I have to take time for me and study for school, they don’t like it. They think I’m basically ignoring them when they’re just so used to my always being around. So you’ve got to deal with that, and for me it’s the emotional part of it, not being able to see my grand-kids as much as I did before and help out as much as I did before. The guilt, that’s my perception more than it is theirs, because they think it’s great that I’m going back to school. I’m used to having the grand children around all the time and now it’s like hard for me to study when they’re there because they’re all so small yet.” - New Student

“I have a three and a half year old son that I have on my own. It wasn’t so much a hard transition as far as time management, I can manage time wisely, my hardest thing,

personally, is the guilt factor, not knowing if it's okay to put him in a K-3 program and me go back to school. You know, making sure that my time is managed equally between work and him and studying. That's the hardest thing for me. (About dealing with the guilt) Just try to justify that, you know, we were together for the first, until I came out to school I stayed full-time with him at home except for working and now it's time for him to have some social interaction with some people and start getting an education past what I can teach him, and, also, I need one to better our lives for later, so that kind of justifies it saying we both need it." - New Student

Other Distractions and the Student Social Life

Students sometimes voiced other distractions. The two most prevalent:

Medical Issues

Two of the thirty-two students voiced medical issues beyond the occasional illness. One was ending the long recovery period from an automobile accident that left her with permanent disabilities. The other student:

"I don't know about anybody else, but sometimes I don't want to come because of health problems, I don't feel good. I have a lot of health problems, arthritis, I don't want to move or nothing let alone come to school. I sit in the desk and my back hurts and my neck hurts and when I walk up and down the steps my hips hurt but I'm still here and I'm not quitting." – Experienced Student

Student Social Life

Interlaced in the comments about their busy lives, many students made comments or alluded to their social activities. These comments indicated that many students had time for activities beyond just studies, work and family obligations. Most clearly:

“Just the usual stuff, you know, if my girlfriend’s mad at me, if nobody’s wanting me to go out, things like that, but other than that” - Experienced Student

“That first semester, it was not good. I didn’t do too well. I was going full-time my first semester and I got two A’s and two F’s, but I actually really never came to school practically. It was low math and stuff that was pretty easy. I never came to school much, I was into the whole partying thing, just out of high school and I was 18 years old. I could go to this club and do this and school wasn’t very high on my priorities I think.”

Student Activities

Student activity options at SCC must be understood in the context of having a Student Activities Director who was a part-time temporary volunteer with only seven months experience at the time of this study and a new graduate of a four-year church related institution. As mentioned in “Student Social Life,” above, students participate in activities. The question was not whether students participated in activities but rather whether those college activities might help with retention. Many students appeared to be eager to participate in activities and some did to the degree available.

“Only time I see other students is inside during class time. I guess I don’t do anything just to come to class.” - Experienced Student

“I might find it interesting in one (extra-curricular activity), but I haven’t really been introduced to any. But that’s not entirely the college’s fault, I really haven’t sought out any either. If I find one, well that’s just gravy, but that’s not really why I’m here.” - New Student

“There could be clubs that people could join in schools. Not everybody would, cause I wouldn’t have wanted to join a club as a new student. But you know, try to figure out people’s interests. I mean, I guess it’s different here than at other colleges because, like when you go away to school you either live in a dorm or you live off campus and you already know people, where like dorm life you get to meet all kinds of different people. And here, I was still living at home.

Well, it’s one thing to talk about stuff that had nothing to do with school inside the classroom, but it’s another thing to talk about what’s going on in class with a student. You can make friends at the same time as learning together and things like that. There was a girl in my class last semester and we talked to each other but we never really had conversations outside the classroom, and then this semester we have another class together and we’ve become friends but we also, every time before a class we get together and study for 3 or 4 hours. But it’s comfortable, you know, because we’re friends at the same time so it’s not an awkward situation or anything like that.

I think we just talk in class about literature and like, wow the teacher did a really good job yesterday or I wish she would hurry up cause it's taking too long to get through chapter one. Starts off with little things that we can relate to because we're in the same class, and then eventually talking more and more and more, you realize you have other interests outside of the classroom or similarities outside of the classroom.” - Experienced Student

“We only 15 minutes between class so we usually walk straight down to the Student Center and get something. We'll talk on the way down there and we'll get out drink or food and walk back to class. There's two TV's, I guess, where you could watch TV, there's really not much else to do. I'd kind of like to see a game room, maybe. If they had a pool table or something that more students could interact with each other. When I was in high school, I played sports so I'd like for the college to have a sports team which I know is out at a community college. Most people that go here have jobs and a family. I played baseball. I like baseball and golf.”

In reference to intramural sports: “Yes, I'd definitely play. That was another thing, I know my girlfriends brother, he goes to Small Private University and they have a golf class and they have to go play golf, but if they had a club or anything, I would participate if it was in a time-frame where I got out of school and I didn't have to work. So between school and work I would definitely do something like that.” - Experienced Student

A 22 year old student who had attended two major four year institutions prior to SCC, in reference to student activities, “No. I’ve been looking to see what’s going on. There’s not a lot of organizations as there is in a four year college. I can see why there’s not because people have to work and everything like that, but I think it would be nice to have more organizations to go to.” If there were activities you were interested in, would you participate? “Yes. I think, net-working with people, I think that’s one of the goals. One of the things people always talk about in getting a job and keeping a job and doing business is who you know. ... Let’s see, I guess a gym would be good here. Not even a full gym, like a basketball court or some tennis courts or something like that.” - Experienced Student

“I do not participate in college activities. Mostly because I don’t have time, really. I go to school out here as much as I can and like I said I work Tuesday night, Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night. Other than that, I try to be in a band, I like to sing. I try to do that in my free time, other than that just hanging out with my friends and spend time with them. My girlfriend goes to school with me here and I have maybe five other people I know that go to college with me out here. I ran into them into them in the classes.”

In reference to activities with fellow students, “Basically I really do not because I come out here and I go to school, when I get free time I do study because I’m focusing on my academics so much. I do find myself sitting down and starting conversations a lot more. I sit in student center and study, that’s where I sit. The only time it gets hard, they have the charter high school here and when they come in for their lunch shift, which falls right in the middle of my lay over between my classes on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s. It’s

a little hard to focus in there then but other than that they have the TV set and background noise to where conversations don't really intrude, couches are comfortable, nobody bothers you really. (Number of people who study in the Student Center) I'd say about 15 people on average. Pretty consistent. When it cleans out there's been downward of like 5 people." - Experienced Student

"Being, especially on a campus, especially where you don't live on campus, you don't have a close relationship per se. You talk to people sitting next to you in classes, but when you're here and your doing classroom things, so it's pretty hard to get connected. I have a person in each class that I can contact if I need notes or something like that. They sat right next to me. I just sort of started up conversations with them. Plus I am involved in the BCM, the Bible Collegiate Ministry. We get together once a week for devotional time and we also have planned ministry and stuff like that that we do on campus. Such as, this coming Thursday, they're having a pancake breakfast thing and they're making pancakes for people and anyone on campus can come and have pancakes. I would prefer more social interaction, but at the same time this is a community college, everyone has their own life, their own set of friends from high school, and things like that. The hard thing is, I just moved here so I didn't really have anyone to begin with. That made it difficult because it's not like going off to a regular college where everyone's brand new.

Having student organizations would be neat. The last school I went to had what they called societies and you had to join a society. Well that's pretty much true of any college. The college my brothers went to had collegians and they had meetings on a

weekly basis and activities, intercollegiate sports, and things like that.” -Experienced Student

In reference to having other student activities: “...Add more. Use the student center more for, like I don’t even know if they have a cafeteria in there. They don’t do a lot of information giving in the beginning. So unless you talk to students who have been here in past quarters or past years, you don’t know anything about the campus.” - Experienced Student

“I see friends on campus then I’ll stop and talk to them about classes, but I wouldn’t say I go and hang out with off of campus that I go on a regular basis and see. Yeah, other than class, I mean, there’s not things to do. Sometimes they have things but there’s nothing else that’s going to be very good. I know they have like that student government thing. They had some sort of band competition last semester, and they had some job fair thing, too. I usually walk through, at least see what they have. Students do, if they’re on campus, I don’t think they drive out to campus, but the ones that are already here, yeah. I usually go to events just to see what’s going on there. I usually go to the film things that they have.” - Experienced Student

“Occasionally before class I’ll talk with a group of students or we’ll try to finish up homework. Well, except for philosophy club, which is students from my prior philosophy class, that’s it, and some in BCM, which is another club. Besides that I guess I wouldn’t

say I have a continual communication with other students. The philosophy club, I got in because I was taking a philosophy class and the person who started it was in my class, so since we don't have time in class to discuss the material at length, they made the club so we could actually talk about the different subject matter. I kind of wished they had put it together a little bit sooner cause they put it together towards the end of the semester, but it does kind of help me keep my interest in coming to school even, wanting to have a reason, cause one of the requirements to join the club was you have to be taking a course, so I guess it gives me an active interest in learning even if I don't want to. The president now, we usually get to talking, we get to talk after the club meeting. We have just little one-on-one or small group discussions. We get to talk about different things other than philosophy and stuff.

The Baptist Ministry Club, I guess I call it my mental health recovery group or something like that. Well, I guess it's more my social group in a way, cause we get to talk about what's going on with our families or going on for the day. We usually have a bible lesson and we have food and we chat more. I guess it's more relaxed than the philosophy club. We have a starting time but it's not fixed, and before we'll have the bible lesson of the day. There's usually 15 or 20 minutes to just talk and ask people what's going on with them or whatever, so there's more unstructured conversation. I think it helps me if I'm stressed out or something instead of just writing, I can say, like if I'm frustrated with something that's going on with school like I have a big report due or whatever. Or occasionally if I'm hungry too, since they have food, that really helps, too."

- Experienced Student

“It was really not exactly what I expected. There’s not a whole lot of standing relationships from class to class. Usually when I go to a class I might have one or two people that I talk to a good bit and when that class is over I may see them again, I may not. It’s not that big of a deal if you don’t. If it is, that’s cool too. Until you get into a standard department, some courses for a major, you really don’t see very many people between one class and the next. There’s a lot of diversity. When you’re in English classes you have near twenty, thirty different majors in there possibly, and depending how many people are in the class you can get into technology courses you’ll see people that are actually following the same path as you. I feel more of a connection with the people in the same department, people I can relate to a little bit more and actually talk about stuff that we both care about, and then other classes it’s more casual conversations consist of “how’s it going”, “see you later”. No real depth to what goes on outside of an actual major that I’m in. I don’t really talk to very many people outside of the classes, and people that I do talk to are people that I’ve known for a long time.” - Experienced Student

“I really haven’t gotten involved in any of that, as far as campus activities are concerned. I’ve really never looked into it. I guess because I’m spending most of my time actually studying right now, still learning how to study again, how to just apply myself to school. And that’s kind of absorbing all of my energy right now. To be honest with you, I don’t even know what activities they have. I’ve never even looked into it to know what outside activities they have going on. Basically I’m just into my family; we do a lot of family

stuff and, like I said, they're very supportive. I've got a group of friends that we email each other back and forth a lot, and they've been great, I mean they're the ones that really helped give me the courage to go back to school. When I lost my job, they were like, yeah, yeah go back to school, it'll be good for you, and you know you can do it. They gave me a lot of confidence in doing this. I've never even met these people, its just people I email back and forth with, and they've just given me a lot of confidence." - New Student

"I'd pretty much come to any engineering type activities that were on campus. I like sports and ride mountain bikes. I like information technology a lot. That's kind of my hobby. Anything that's technology-based I'd probably come to school for, extra activity." -Experienced Student

"I'd like to see a basketball team here, football, something like that, why not, it'd give me something to do." - New Student

"Right now, I guess maybe a chess club. Probably more activities toward some kind of sport; I like watching them, I won't participate in them." - New Student

"I don't have the time. Well, I shouldn't say I don't have the time, because some of the stuff I don't know what's going on is here, but the teacher bring it up and when she bring it up it be a little too late before I can do anything." - New Student

“I work about 20 hours per week. And then when I do have time I’m usually too tired to study.” In reference to social activities: “Not hardly. I might go hang out at a friend’s house. It would be nice if they did have some sports, but it’s just a two year school” - New Student

“I don’t, I don’t have a whole lot of time but if there’s ever been anything I’ve ever come across. I haven’t really looked because I don’t have a whole lot of time; but there’s nothing that I’ve heard about that I was just, oh I really want to do that. I would actually kind of like there to be a larger music but that’s kind of relative to what a person wants to do. It’s not like sports, like some people want to do some sports here and there. “ - Experienced Student

“Not really, I guess I’m just a student at the college, not really apart of the college I guess.” - Experienced Student

And for a different perspective:

A 52-year-old retiree in community college to get a certificate; in reference to participation in campus activities. “ No, I have not, and I think it’s probably cause of me that I just don’t need to. I have my church group type people, family, community groups, and I’m not involved in any student related activities for the college. I see where that is important for new students coming into a school or for the first time to be able to develop relationships with other students. I remember back in my initial college days that that

was important to meet other people, to work with other people, to interact with other people, to discuss class work with other people, to get their ideas of things. And I even did that in previous military school in the Army War College (*graduate level college for senior offices*), we spent a lot of group time together discussing things, which is very important. Discussing issues related around the course work. With me right now in my position, I don't see that necessary because I'm back focused on learning as much as I can in a short period of time and moving back into the work force. I'm continually looking everyday for a job, a part-time job, but I don't think that I'm going to be very successful until I finish the certificate program and take the national certification test."

- Experienced Student

I Want to go to a "Real College"

During one of the interviews, the student used the term 'like a real college.' Other students brought up, or alluded to, the same concept. Invariably it was in the context of campus activities or interaction with students, never in an academic context. Below are the clearest references to a "real college."

Researcher: The philosophy meeting, or you talked about the film Lord of the Rings and it's analysis. So, that kind of activity, can you tell me how it affects you?

"I think it makes it seem like this is a real college. I mean, here I'm doing things that are like that, cause you feel like, it's like kids that go to the four-year schools, you know, they're doing stuff. Having events about all the time. Anyway at community colleges,

it's nice to know that they do that too, plus it's pretty interesting to go to it. It used to be if you didn't get in, the emphasis on going to school, to go to the four year thing, but if you don't then you know you must not be as smart or you must have slacked off or something, but when you get here it's the same. And you talk to the people that are there, they're in the same stuff and doing the same work as they are, just in a different place. It's just, you hear them making jokes about community college and stuff. A community thing, it's not like a real school but if you actually go to it, it is. It's better than high school." - Experienced Student

"I wish I could go to a bigger university, I'd love to go to University of the State. Because I'm a 'Tiger,' I love it. I don't know, I was just raised to be a 'Tiger' and I would have loved to go there. I think it would make my parents proud of me.

I'm not really in a position to pack up and move to Capital City. I don't know, I don't think financial aid would pay for me to go full ride to a big university like that. But I don't know, but I don't really think it's one of my options, it's more of a dream than an option." - New Student

"I feel like I come here, take my little class, and leave. It's like high school, in a way. They're the same because I can't stay on campus, have my little college life, and be independent." - New Student

“No, because most of my friends either didn’t go to a college at all or either went to State University or bigger universities. I think SCC is a lot different than State University or any other college. The main people that go here are families and working full time and they have a lot going on outside of college besides just going to school like you do at State University or anything. I have some friends that go to State University and all they do is go to school and come home and study where as I go to school and I may go to two different jobs in the same day and none of them even work. So I think that’s what makes SCC different, I think.” (Note: State University is thirty to forty-five minute commute from SCC.) – Experienced Student

“Yeah, I look at this place as, it’s obviously a college education that you’re getting here, but I also look at it as it’s like a stepping stone for me so I’m looking at down the road, the university where I attend I will be involved in but this one I just want to focus squarely on getting my grades up and then I can move onto the next level. (*Note: this student has attended SCC for three years*) For the most part, to be successful, you have to have a college degree and that’s what I was looking at and whether I necessarily liked the school or not, I knew I had to stay here cause I wouldn’t really be able to succeed without a degree. SCC is alright. I would rather have gone to a four-year institution first, but that’s not relevant now. I just think the camaraderie at a four year school is a lot better because you’re around the same kids all the time and I think probably the on-campus housing is what does it, I think that has a lot to do with it, just the camaraderie of

everybody because you're around people all the time, all the kids all the time, I mean basically 24-7, like house campus to a point." - Experienced Student

"It seems some classes are better than others, some are a little more interactive, that way you get to know more of the students around you, but I think so far interaction is good, it's minimal, it's still community college I guess. I don't really know what I think that a bigger university would entail, but I imagine most students living on or around campus, having campus activities, you get to know more people. Here, I definitely have people, you sit around or if you have discussion in class or groups you definitely get to know a couple of people, but I don't get to know everyone, of course." - New Student

In reference to relationships with fellow students: "That depended on the class too. I feel more of a connection with the people in the same department, people I can relate to a little bit more and actually talk about stuff that we both care about, and then other classes it's more casual conversations consist of "how's it going", "see you later". No real depth to what goes on outside of an actual major that I'm in. I don't really talk to very many people outside of the classes, and people that I do talk to are people that I've known for a long time. A couple from high school and just a few acquaintances that I've met from different places like out and about, maybe at work, people that I see every once in a while. Everybody kind of keeps to themselves for the most part. I think it's because they're here at a community college. There's not a sense of unity like there would be at a four year. If say somebody goes to State University, you would be part of State

University, you're the State crew, you've got the team, you got the whatever, the sororities, whatever you're a part of. There's none of that here, I mean, you go to school and you go to work.

There doesn't seem to be one thing that unites everybody here. You've got the name, you all go to SCC, at the same time, there's not like a symbol, there's nothing that identifies you with the school really. I mean, in comparison to four-year colleges, but most four-year colleges have like a team logo, you'll see the logo driving around and when you see just that you know what it is. If you see somebody with a State University sticker, you know it's a State sticker by the logo; State, New York University, Oregon State University, whatever. I'm sure they have them, but you don't see SCC stickers on people's cars very often.

An effort probably could be made, but people here seem to be content with the fact that you kind of come, you do your work, and then you leave. I mean you'll talk to people in class, I wouldn't consider my friends because the only time I see them is during that hour and a half that we're in class together.” - Experienced Student

Instructors – A Key

Of all of the interview questions, ‘tell me about your instructors’ resulted in comments by every student and their tone made it clear that this was a significant issue. It was noted that most students commented on both the good and the bad aspects of instructors. No student interviewed was completely negative.

Students were clear that the quality of their instructors was critical to the student, and so was their relationship with instructors.

Importance

The literature states that the single most significant factor in student retention is the informal interaction between the student and the faculty. The following story, and the student comment that follows it, are clear examples of the importance a faculty member had on two, different struggling students.

“Oh no, I’ve never felt like I belong in school. School has always been real challenging to me. I’m not the ideal student that you would see. If you had the capability to read my mind, I’m not the type of student who likes to sit hours on end in a college setting in a classroom and listen to a professor lecture. I do it because I know I have to do it to pass that class and learn the material but I find nothing more boring than doing that, I’m just not that type of person because I’m a very busy person, I like to be moving, I like to be doing something, I’m a very hands-on person. So for me it’s almost like confining a songbird to never sing again, that’s sort of how I feel.”

Can you tell me about what happened during your college career that got you to stay in college?

“There’s been a really, really good person, I mean she didn’t have to do some of the things she did but she was always very encouraging asking me how I was doing when I came to sign up for classes. There would be times when I’d say, I’m just ready to quit

school because the classes are kind of hard and some of the professors don't want to work with me. But she would always tell me, stick in there it's going to be worth it. It's very hard to encourage yourself and when you have somebody else in your corner and they're telling you that they're rooting for you and you're going to do well, it really kind of keeps that fire ignited up underneath you to keep at it. So that has helped a lot, as for that aspect of having somebody in your corner cheering you on, helping you. She's a faculty/friend because we actually become friends, too. Just her demeanor. She knew that I had very hard school things that I was having to go through, classes being canceled at the last minute on me, finding classes very, very difficult to get through, you know things like that. She kind of just befriended me. I guess she knew that I'm more of a loner, I guess she could kind of tell that I stick to myself and she just really showed me a kindness about her and ever since then, I mean we have a real good rapport with each other. Whenever I see her, she asks me how I'm doing with my classes and just checkin' up on me, stuff like that. I really feel like that kept me going as far as having somebody in my corner that believes in me and I don't want to let them down as well, so that's why I've kind of been like I'm going to try to stick through this thing." – Experienced Student

"Oh, I'm not going to quit. There's no way on God's green earth, unless God Himself stops me cold, that I'm going to quit school. All of my instructors are very encouraging. Like I said, Friday when I left here I was in tears, one of the instructors that works in the math center, you know they have so many different ones come in at different times, it was a problem with the computer, it was not me" - New Student

What Makes a Good Instructor: As Seen by the Student

Perception that they Care; By Deed and by Word

“Once again, I think it all goes back to the instructors. If you’ve got really good instructors and really good people working at the college to help you and to keep you interested in it and to give you the encouragement, okay you can’t do it right now but you can always come back and do it. And you have instructors who care enough to say, this is what you need to do and you’ve just got to do it somehow. I think that’s what colleges need is just really good people working, who actually care that you’re there and care that you’re going to make it all the way through regardless of how long it takes you to get through.” - New Student

“Some teachers care, some of em don’t. Ones that care, you know, you can tell how they present their self, they’re more friendly, they dealt with you, like about, they give more examples of the work, like with everyday life. Teachers who don’t care they just put everything on the board, they explain some of it but most of it they don’t, they just give you the work, and that’s when you know they don’t too much care if you pass or you fail. Cause that gives me more encouragement of staying in college. If somebody’s out there that cares.” - New Student

“It’s a caring atmosphere. It goes beyond the typical classroom. I thing it’s, not only are there concerns about making sure you’re in class on time, handing in your homework assignments, being prepared for your exams, they show that they care about you as a

person, that you're not just another student, not just another body in the seat." - New Student

"I've had one particular instructor and I have her again this semester. She is really, really has a heart for students, you can really tell. This on-line class which, an on-line class can be a little bit more difficult because you're not in the classroom setting and you're out there on your own, but then for yourself now there is interaction with the professor through emails and things like that, so if you don't understand something, you can always email the professor. The thing I like about this professor, even if you're not having trouble in the class, she just gives you a friendly hello just to see how you're doing, asking you if there's anything she can help you with, and to me that means a lot to me because you want to make sure you have somebody in your corner or if you're unsure about the way they're presenting the material, because like I say on on-line classes you're reading all the material yourself, there's nobody there to explain anything to you at all, you're having to learn this on your own. So if there's something that you don't understand, it's up to you to correspond with the professor, I really like that about her. She'll send me quite a few emails just to say, I'm just checkin on you to see how you're doing, I really have liked that and I feel that she's one of the very few that has a heart with the students. - Experienced Student

"So far, I think we have some of the best teachers. I think they're very supportive, a lot of different outlets, if you ever needed help, any one of my classes, they always have

office hours, they're always stressing if you have any problems come by and see us. Especially in my first semester I had a history professor he offered every single opportunity for you to pass his class, not necessarily to do well, he was hard, but he definitely offered every opportunity for you to pass his class." - New Student

"Well, first of all they let us know right away, this is my office number, this the phone number, this is my email, you can come talk to me any time, going up after class and talking to them. They're very receptive and well, if you have any other questions just let me know you can contact me here or there, whatever. I know other students who have gone in and actually have had to talk to them. I've seen them in the hall, they're always friendly, you know hi, how ya doin,' that kind of thing." - New Student

"I'm taking my logic class with Sue Blue, who I get along with really well. When I go ask her questions she's more than willing to answer and help me in anyway she can. My Spanish teacher's the same way. My biology teacher knows my name and compliments me when I do well in class, which is something I didn't get from State University either. But the instant gratification doing well in class when she hands back papers, she'll stop and say, you did really well Joe, whereas I never got that out there. My Western Civ teacher I get along with really well, Mr. Green's nice. I've talked with him outside of class, like I've walked out with him, had conversations, the meaning of what class was about. He went to State University, described growing up in the area where he hangs out and stuff like that. It's just a lot more personal, I think. They actually know me, they

know a little bit more about me. I didn't get one of those sheets that says, write three things about yourself and that's all they were going to keep the whole semester, you know. They didn't ask you any of those questions, they just went with it like, we're all going to be here and we'll get to know each other by the end of the semester."

- Experienced Student

"Well basically just in class, but after class if I have any questions or even during class if I have any questions, they're always very willing to answer. They're all available anytime, so if I wanted to talk to one of them I could go to them at any time and talk to them. They've been great with that. I've talked to only one teacher outside of classes because we can do an extra credit project but we need to get with her in order to get it all set up, so I've talked with her about that. But the instructors so far have been great; they've made the classes very interesting. ... That particular instructor is great. She makes the class interesting, she's always willing to answer questions, she just interacts with the students so well I think she'd make anybody comfortable to talk to her." - New Student

"Miss Evans, she's the department head for the Department, we have a good relationship. I go see her. She works late nights so I see her out here when I'm working (as a campus security guard). We talk all the time. All the instructors I know, I talk to them, especially when I work at night and I have that building, I talk to em. Mr. Brown, he's a financial advisor; he and I talked today, telling me whenever I got a job come talk to him.

I've helped some of the teachers out; one of the teachers does, I don't know what he does, he volunteers for the Race for the Cure, I think. I helped him, I think, one time. They needed a security guard so I volunteered to work for that and then, that's pretty much it. I guess there's a small number of students in the managing and marketing department, they see the students semester after semester so they get to know each other."

- Experienced Student

"And the teachers seem to know your name when you walk by them outside the class, you know, walking in between. Like Mr. Jones. You know, most of them will stop and talk to you, ask you how you're doing, even if you don't have them anymore for class, they'll still remember who you are, which for me, I'm not used to that cause I know in high school I'd see them everyday for a year and they still couldn't get my name right. I'm already graduating and the lady said, 'congratulations' and called me the wrong name, and walking off and going, how did you get that wrong, it wasn't even close."

Experienced Student

"Like my reading teacher, Ms. Smith, I went up to her the other day and I asked her, I said, Ms. Smith, can I ask you a question? And she said, 'honey, you can ask me anything you want to'; she says, 'if I don't have an answer we'll find out.' And I was telling her that I was thinking about changing my major and she asked me why and I told her and she said, 'do you have an idea of what you're wanting to go for' and I said, yes ma'am, I said, but I wanted to ask your opinion about it because you are my reading

teacher. And I said I'm thinking of going into early child development, that way I could teach Headstart, and she said 'I think you would be good at it.' She said, 'I really do.' She said, you have the skills and she said, you're smart.

Ms. Brown. I can tell her anything, you know, she's always ready to help me in any way, shape, or form. Now, my math teacher's a little different. I get along with her and there is respect there because she is my teacher and stuff, but I don't like the way she teaches the class." - New Student

Challenge

None of the students interviewed said anything about wanting an easy instructor. To the contrary, most implied they were in the class to learn and some specifically stated that they wanted to be academically challenged.

"I like someone that's mentally challenging. I have had a couple of instructors that I didn't really think that boggled the mind at all, but some of them make you think and push you a little passed, I like being challenged and making sure that I am at college level. I want to make sure that I am challenged to the point where if next semester I have a really hard teacher that I'm going to do well and that I'm going to be up to par. I think that's what makes a good teacher in my eyes." - New Student

"My elective classes seem a little boring at the moment, but I'm enjoying math. It's kind of a difficult math class but I'm enjoying the challenge." - New Student

“...there was one instructor that I had that she actually commented and she pinpointed that, she’s like, you want to be a student. I’m like, yes ma’am, and as soon as she said that it’s kind of like I have to live up to the expectation that she has of me now.” - New Student

“...because I get criticized (critiqued) more here than at State University, and for me that’s a big thing. If you criticize me, like if you say I’m not doing well I take it to heart, if you say I’m doing well I take it to heart as equally well, but if you don’t say anything at all I just don’t really care. Criticism is a good thing, by far. At least then you know somebody cares, you’re not just doing it just for that little piece of paper, you’re doing it because somebody’s taking their time to try to show you something and your actions determine how they feel about their job.” - Experienced Student

“Because I like the challenge that it brought, I like the accounting program.”

- Experienced Student

Not Boring – But Involved and Understanding

“I like them because they’re involved with the class. They don’t stand up there and mumble in a tone and say this is what we’re doing today and this is what’s in the book, they get involved. They make us go places, they make us look at things in a different light, they don’t allow you to sit in class in the back of the room and never say a word. It’s interesting and it makes it fun. You gotta go to these classes two days a week or

three days a week, you don't want to sit there and try to fall asleep because it's the same monotone voice day in and day out." - Experienced Student

"I'm not a professor but speaking on a student standpoint, I wish a lot of professors here would realize that everybody learns at a different learning capacity. You may be great at math where I might be mediocre, or I might be great in English where you might be very low in English. So, that in mind, a lot of professors need to realize when they have people from all different backgrounds, all different ethnic and races, they've got to realize that everybody does not know it when they come in that class, and they've got to realize that everybody may not catch on the first couple of weeks something they might be teaching. A lot of professors have the attitude, if you don't know it then oh well, and it shouldn't be that way because they've got to realize that they were in our place once before and I'm sure they wanted someone to explain or go into more detail about something they may not have understood." - Experienced Student

"I've never had anybody to be rude to me. Anytime I've ever had a problem or anything, they've always tried to help me. Last semester hours really stretched it out with stuff happening at home and then school and somehow I forgot a paper, well I had a paper but the floppy disk wouldn't, something was wrong with the floppy disk, I had to re-do it and my teacher told me to just bring it back that she understood that I'd try to do it, and she let me bring it back a couple days later. So that was really helpful, it took a lot of stress off when I found out I could bring it back." - Experienced Student

Been in the Workforce

In certain disciplines, students valued the practical aspect provided by an instructor that had actually performed in the workforce. The instruction, and the perceived authority and credibility, was not based solely on the academic experience of the instructor.

“Once I got here and I started taking some of the classes and I saw that I had teachers that had been in the work force and they knew a lot about how everything worked and then they were relating that back to the classroom, I think that really helped to see a lot of what would be going on once we got through with school.” - Experienced Student

“I have a very good relationship with them. I like them. Most of them have worked in the industry that they’re teaching, so they bring a lot more to the table than just a book smart.” - Experienced Student

What Makes a Bad Instructor: As Seen by the Student

The Opposite of Good

Just as the students evidenced passion about their good instructors, they showed corresponding passion about their less than good instructors. The opposite of caring and communicative were high on their list. Additionally, there were some specific examples. There are lessons in the negative for faculty and administrators.

“Some teachers care, some of ‘em don’t.” - New Student

“Some of the teachers are very intimidating once you get into college. There was one English teacher I had that the whole class was very intimidated by him. Probably by the end of the semester, there was only less than half of us left in the class. He was really straightforward; he basically would tell you that you’re going to work very hard or you’re going to be lucky to pass. A lot of people, especially in the first semester, that kind of scares them knowing that they’re going to have to work a lot harder and if they don’t work that hard that they might not even pass the class.” - Experienced Student

“A lot of them are hard to get hold of, some of them have very small amount of hours that they’re actually in their office as if say they’re in classes a lot or they’re not really a main campus teacher and they just come here for a few classes, so they’re not really around here as much and it’s kind of hard to get a hold of them. A lot of them now have moved most of their contacts that you know. It’s not as personal, it’s harder to, cause you’ll type them a question on e-mail and they send it back but it’s not as one-to-one as when they sit there and actually explain it out to you on a piece of paper right there in front of you.”

– New Student

“Some professors that have been very, very understanding in trying to work with the students, but I have had quite a few, too, that have been very just, ah, I feel like they’re in the wrong field. I feel like some people are good teachers and some people are just not cut out for that job, I mean they have the degree and everything, to be a teacher, but I don’t think that’s the field they need to be in cause I feel like to be a professor you have

to care about the students. A lot of them just feel like they have to have the attitude that if you don't get it then oh well, I don't care, and it shouldn't be that way because a college should realize that without the students the college would not exist."

- Experienced Student

In reference to relationship with instructors, "I don't have one. I go to class, listen, do my work, and go home and do my homework." - New Student

In reference to relationship with instructors, "Not much. I just go in there and copy down notes and go about my business and do my studying." - New Student

"I haven't really had a bad experience, too bad, but just say, class discussions in English, I'm really not interested in English too much, so I kind of get counted off for class participation. It's kind of a mixture of that (not interested) and I'm kind of shy in front of a group of people." – Experienced Student

"There haven't been very many instructors that I've really gotten close with, I mean there's been a few that I've required a little more help from than others, and probably about, ah, there's only been one or two that I've had problems with trying to get extra help when I needed it, relative to what's being done. But, really, relationships with instructors is kind of relative to the instructor, like in the class I just came from, you know Williams' a pretty cool guy, you know we can joke around with him. I don't really

want to say on the same level, but we can joke with each other and it's not a big deal. There are other instructors we don't really want to joke around with the same way because they're not going to react to it as well." - Experienced Student

"I don't really talk that much with the teachers unless they need to see me. I don't really go up to them. I can say that my classes are fairly easy instead of hard. Like, the math class that I'm in is boring because I already know half the stuff they're doing, it's just a refreshment and when we start doing the next, then I'm interested. In my reading class, the teacher's not exciting, the girl's not teaching. She's partially deaf, bless her heart, but if she can't hear what we say, she'll just keep going. We're answering the question but she can't hear us." - New Student

"He's just kind of sarcastic. He kind of makes me feel stupid so I don't want to ask him any questions. He like laughs at the questions that some, not only me but other people in the class. He just kind of laughs at them like, you're an idiot for asking that." - New Student

"Delay on all my things. I have an English teacher who has, I guess it's been two and a half weeks now that we handed in our paper and she hasn't given them back to us, and she told us today that there's another group of people that she hasn't returned their papers yet and that's been three and a half weeks since they got their paper. So it's kind of hard to tell how she's grading considering I haven't seen my grade yet and our next paper is

due Thursday. We mention it every single class and she says I'll get to it." - Experienced Student

"It's computer based and she doesn't teach, and I've heard a lot of people say that they're in computer-based classes but the teacher teaches. Ours is computer based and like when we start a new chapter, she doesn't review before we start it. We just automatically go into it in the computer and we figure it out on our own, and then she'll review right before the test and she'll write the answers down on the chalkboard or the overhead. And if you've got any questions about something that you failed on the test then she'll work it out for you, but other than that, that's it. So when I go for my next math class, I want traditional, I don't want computer based." - New Student

"...because he reads out of the book." - Experienced Student

Lack of Classroom Discipline

Conscientious students were clear that they thought that classroom discipline was the instructors' responsibility, and that they did not appreciate instructor laxness in that area. Students wanted to learn and did not want the distractions that result from inadequate classroom discipline.

"I think some instructors need to be more disciplining, because some people in class are just so rude to them and disrespectful that it gets on my nerves. Talking while they're

trying to teach or commenting on how the work that they get is insignificant or stupid, and just, honestly, making an ass of themselves. I just find it disrespectful to the instructor. I don't think instructors do enough, I really don't. I believe you know if they're disrupting the class and disrupting me from being able to listen and to learn and to get what I need that they should just step up and ask them to leave or whatever, but I don't know what they're able to do. I mean, this isn't high school or middle school or anything like that. I mean, we're all paying to be here. You know I'm not really sure what the limitations are and what they can, I mean they can't smack with a ruler or anything." - New Student

"Some of my classes, like my English class, there's these people that sit right behind me and talk the whole class. And it's kind of whisper but it's really loud, you know, and I asked Ms. Smith to say something to them and I guess she did, I don't know, but they still talk, and stuff like that. And then cell phones, they get on my nerves so bad. And people coming in 10 minutes late, cause that ain't fair to everybody else." - New Student

"It makes me mad. I'm here to get an education and that's another thing that makes me mad sometimes too is like when we're in class, especially Susan's class, and I'm trying to hear what she's got to say and people behind me are cutting up and talking and passing notes. This is not high school, this is college, you're supposed to be mature when you get here." - New Student

Advising – Another Key

Student comments reinforced the literature; good advising is critical to the student's success and retention. Given the number of first generation students in community colleges and the earlier reported findings on the students' fear generated by not knowing what to expect in higher education, having an individual that could advise them on how to navigate in their new environment was critical.

SCC had faculty advisors assigned to students. This study did not attempt to clarify whether the student was referring to student services or faculty advisors during their comments, although it was apparent in some cases. No student ever made a comment about the source of the advising. It did not appear that the students made a clear, if any, distinction. They were clear about the importance of good advising. This suggests that student service and faculty advising must be well coordinated.

“My first time I came in here I went upstairs to the testing and took my test and they printed out all my scores and then I went next door and they basically gave me the handbook I'm at and what classes I was able to start in and what classes I was able to start in that I wanted to and pulled up a schedule, and that's kind of how I got started. I guess because it wasn't very informative, they just kind of like give you this handbook and they don't go through anything or anything like that. They give you a map and go okay this is the building and this is the building you'll be in, they just kind of give it all to you and let you go with it.” (*So did you know what to expect when you got here?*) “No, I had no clue.” - Experienced Student

“With transferring stuff, it’s hard figuring out what classes are really going to transfer and which ones don’t. It’s just hard to figure out that career plan of what your major should be and stuff, and talking with counselors, cause there’s so many people, that they don’t have, you know, ah. That’s what I was trying to say, it’s the time thing with the advisors and stuff, it’s hard figuring out, and even then when they’re already teachers and they have to deal with classes and then they have to come in with you, it’s just hard to figure out exactly where you’re gonna go and exactly what you wanna do, because you can’t, I mean I don’t know everything about this kinda thing coordinate it all.”

- Experienced Student

“I have questions about academics, where to go from here. My advisor, he’s not quite helpful, I think that words just kind of randomly thrown out to advisors, it would be a lot better if it was like, what are you thinking about doing, what college are you thinking about going to, you might want to see this person they have more information. Because he has no idea and he just kind of flips through a book going, yep that transfers. It takes us an hour to do my schedule every semester. I do understand how to get through the college process, but I’ve done it myself looking up SCC courses and looking up the college that I want to go to and the courses that transfer over there. I think it would be more helpful for my advisor to know how to do it. That’d be great.” - New Student

“For someone who was coming out of a marriage that felt kind of, who had no job, really no home, had lost so much, to go from that to be where I am right now, I’ve gotten a great deal of confidence since I’ve been back at school. I think it was, I have an advisor who I respect very much and who has kind of taken me under his wing, as he does all his students by the way, he’s just great. He’s asked me to join the honors program, so I applied to that.” - New Student

Some Students do Not Understand Why They are Taking a Course

“I’m sittin’ there bored. I don’t know. I guess that’s what they told me to be in. That’s what the placement test put me in.” - New Student

“I took trigonometry in high school, just that I’ve been out so long you just forget it. When are you going to use trig in cooking? There’s no application for that. Why take a bunch of classes that you’re never going to apply to your life in the first place? Just because the board says you have to have this? It makes no sense to me. I mean because it’s a standard all across the world that you’ve got to have geometry, why? For what reason? If you need geometry in the field that you’re studying, then you should be required to take it. If you have no practical use for that course, then why am I paying the money to take that course? Somebody help me out. This is just obvious facts, this is the way I look at it.

If it was up to me, you’d pay for what you need and what you don’t need, there’s just more knowledge that’s confusion than there is. ...

The advisor. I met her twice and then the two times I met her it was quick pass to the ball back. She tells you what you gotta have, you ask questions, she can't tell you anything, you ask why, it's just because you got to " - Experienced Student

In reference to why the student had chosen to enroll in the 'College Skills' course: "Basically because they didn't have anything else to put me in, and it's like by me being on financial aid I have to be a full-time student. So basically what happened was this was the only opening and I ended up getting put in here." - New Student

" I'll just hopefully pass English, that's really all I care about. I really don't see why it's really too important in the field that I'm going into. I wish it was more of a technical type English. I wish we didn't have to write about personal topics. We had to write about a family member. We had to write about feelings. I'm just not really into that stuff. Some people are. If we were doing research or writing about more technical issues, I'd do a lot better. We actually wrote a paper on like how we use technology, how it's evolving. I feel like I did way better on that essay than any of the other ones. It's just what interests me or not." -Experienced Student

Developmental Classes – The Issue from the students' viewpoint

Two new students expressed an understanding of why developmental or remedial courses are needed.

“I needed a big time refresher. I think it’s like the very first math class that you have to take.”- New Student

“I probably should’ve started lower in English than I did but I tested out I guess. I probably should’ve started lower in English just cause I guess I can comprehend stuff and find the errors, but I don’t know.” - New Student

Virtually all of the other students interviewed who were in developmental courses did not evidence the understanding of why they were enrolled in, much less the values of, the developmental courses. As implied in the above student comments about taking trigonometry and English, some students did not see the value in taking some courses, and they resent any version of, ‘because you have to.’ This applied to developmental courses as well, if not more so. Students wanted courses to be relevant, in their perception, to their goals.

“I was kind of thinking after my first semester or after my first year, I might not want to go to college, then a side of me said you got to push on, you got to keep going and you know what you’re trying to get to, you know your goal. But it’s inside that saying ‘why stay in school, stay in some of these classes that’s not even basically pertaining to your major. Why not go get what your goal and what your major is.’

I’m getting my degree in business management. I have not yet took a class that’s pertaining to my degree and I feel like if you come to college, at least give us some

leeway, at least say well we're going to put you in this class and this is a way that you can learn about your degree, or something like that. I know they have developmental classes because we might have forgotten something or we might not have been in the class in high school to remember or whatever. We could have been fooling around in high school but, by me for example, I'm taking Math 101 and I took it two times in high school, this is my second time this year in college taking it and it's getting boring. Not just the class, I know the material, but it starts to get drilled in your head so much that you start to get aggravated and you're not wanting to do this anymore, it's like giving up." - New Student

"I've talked to my advisor, well you got to do this, you got to do that. I said, can I at least take something that's interesting, that's going to keep me coming here? No, you gotta take this first, you can't take any other class till you had this developmental courses. That's crazy! That's why people quit. So, he's telling me this is what I got to do and I'm really not liking it in the first place. I'm not gonna stay. I don't care, you know what I'm saying, it's not my money, I'm getting grants that's paying for everything, so what am I losing? All I'm losing is time, so I can go get a job and forget about this dream I had for a little while or work around it, go another route or something. But that's my take on it, it's just discouraging. If they would throw in just one class that's pertaining to your curriculum, to what you came to SCC to do. That's just one more thing of interest that makes you get up in the morning to come to school, otherwise, man I just got English, I just got math, I missed this day." - Experienced Student

Why Students Say They Stay

Students gave numerous reasons for their persistence in community college. Also, these reasons were not discrete. The sub-affinities had significant overlap but knowing that there are components to this affinity provides valuable insight in the development of retention programs. More than one sub-affinity can influence the same student to cause the student to stay.

First the Negative

“All my friends have surely dropped out and they’re the ones that call me and say, hey you want to go do something? Well, no, I got school. Oh, that’s all right, you ain’t missed a day. Yeah I know that but if I were to see my Dad out somewhere when I was supposed to be in school, it’d be nothing pretty.” - Experienced Student

Parents, Family and Friends

“To have the support, it’s kind of like it’s your team and they’re rooting you on.”

- Experienced Student

“I have support because my mother died, my relatives, they didn’t think I was going to graduate and do the things that I do, you know. I don’t have any kids right now and I’m doing a lot to pursue my goals and none of them thought I would do it but they all back me up. They’re always there if I need them. ... My mother wouldn’t want me to stop doing what I’m doing because she passed on.” - Experienced Student

“Mainly for my children, to instill in them the motivation that it takes more than a high school diploma to be successful in life, and for my mother, knowing that all her children would have a college degree, and that’s honest.” - Experienced Student

“I’d say, I have an aunt and uncle that are in their early thirties and they’re actually just finishing up their college and they say ‘so you won’t be like me, just now getting my master’s degree at 34 and they kind of push me to do it, and if I need any help, if I need the work or financially or anything, they’re there for me.” - Experienced Student

“My mother, I don’t want to have problems financially like she does. I want to be able to do more than she has. “ - New Student

For Themselves

“I guess you’ve got to do what’s right for you. You can’t go around doing stuff for other people, I mean, try to make someone else happy or try to fill someone else’s shoes. You know, if someone tells you engineering is the new stuff, this is a fast track to money, blah, blah, blah, or your mom and dad are doctors and now you have to... It’s more, what are you wanting to do in the long run is the most important thing you can think of.”
- Experienced Student

“I knew that I wanted to succeed and that I wanted to be in school. I think that’s one reason why I stayed. I felt like that if I had taken any time off that I probably wouldn’t

have come back. I think that in the end, by me staying in college, it's going to benefit me big time, because I don't want to work at the bridal shop for the rest of my life. I think it had to with responsibility for myself because my mom was like, I'm not paying for your school anymore, I'm not giving you money to this anymore, so it was like, even though I still live at home it's like I have to pay for the things I want. Like to go to school, I pay for that. To get books, I pay for that. So it's my money so of course I'm going to value it more then someone else's money." - Experienced Student

"When I start college, I start looking up. I feel more and more elated and looking forward to a better position and getting involved and I feel like I have something to talk about." - Experienced Student

"...knowing more of like what my weak spots are, like time management or knowing that I put stuff off I'll try to stay; like I know if I'm at the campus I know I'll be able to do my school work more. I also think since, what also helped me was, I kind of liked the college because there wasn't as much of a campus life like rowdy parties or anything, because that would be a big distraction for me." - Experienced Student

Job Related

"I think in the long run it's really going to pay off, once I get my degree. I'll be making more money than I've ever made in my life regardless of what I do. I'm used to making

\$2.11 an hour plus my tips. The best job I ever had I guess, the biggest paying job, not the best job, was \$10/\$11 an hour.” - New Student

“Today’s life-style requires that more people need an education to get a job. They won’t look at you, banks won’t even look at you for business loans if you don’t have educational background and on the job training. It seems like it’s more of a need and my husband and I want to make a life for ourselves that we don’t have to face that. My husband has also been laid off in the past, and it’s a hard thing to do when you lose two-thirds of your income with not much else left in the area. So, we just decided it was time.” - Experienced Student

“I watched my sister jump from job to job and I’ve worked at the same restaurant for about three years, and I like my job but I don’t want to do that for the rest of my life. I don’t want to go through my life making \$7.00 an hour, you know I want to be able to buy a house and buy a car, not be in debt for the rest of my life. Basically that if I didn’t I wouldn’t have a career. That’s kind of my whole philosophy; I mean I don’t like school at all. If I could find a job today and train me and give me everything I needed to know to do the job, I’d quit school today because I don’t like doing it. I don’t like having to study, I don’t like the tests, I don’t like the homework. But I know that I have to do it. I know that in order to accomplish my goal at something I’m going to have to push through.” - Experienced Student

“Fear of being poor, being broke, struggling through life, trying to make a living. I would say wanting to make my parents happy. That’s the only thing they’ve ever really asked of me, that’s the main thing they’ve always asked me to get a degree in something. It doesn’t matter what you want to do, just have a degree in something. That’s another thing, I start feeling bad sometimes, you know, I don’t want to flunk out, be a failure to them. I’d say personally you just want more and the only way to do that is to have a degree.” - Experienced Student

Faculty and College Academic Programs

This sub-affinity also had direct relationships with the affinities, “What Makes a Good Instructor” and “Advising – Another Key.” In the comments below, the direct influence on student retention is clear.

“Well, with the fact that there’s so much, like with the writing center and everything, there’s a lot here to help out as far as computers and they have a math lab for people that help with math tutoring, and the writing center for English. From what I hear of other universities, there’s a lot more of certain tutoring and going to teachers from a lot of the people I know that go to the universities around here. I haven’t heard a lot about them having like a writing labs, stuff like that. Knowing that even like my first math teacher that I had she’s like, if you ever need any help on anything else you can come back to me. I mean, on any of my other classes I could go back to her if I had any questions or thought I needed any extra help, she’d take out of her office hours and help me with stuff.

...and I guess it also kind of helped because I knew her from having talks with her before, to go back to her and her questions.” - Experienced Student

“I feel really confident when I do. It’s just something I like doing. I know I mess up sometimes, especially in certain classes, but I learn from the mistakes and the chefs don’t say, that’s bad. They tell you what you can do good. ... because of my classmates, and my professors, especially in one of my classes where we have to work in groups. So it’s not just you doing by yourself, it’s you and your groups and it’s a good blending of strengths and weaknesses.” - Experienced Student

“I’d say just classes I guess, you can choose your major and stuff that you’re more interested in. I mean in high school you have to take this, you have to deal with this, but then in college you can try different things and you can take what you want and maybe learn something more interesting than some of the other stuff they make you take.” - Experienced Student

Focus Through Professional Help

One student stated that she had counseling with a psychologist and the major issue was finding her goal and the confidence to pursue it.

“I went and talked to a psychologist and I think he helped me. Also I wasn’t real sure what I wanted to do and I think that was another fear because I had no clue what I wanted

to do. I had all these ideas growing up but when it came to it I didn't feel it was realistic to pursue these, you know after years and years of saying I want to do this, things change, you change and you decide you want to do something else, and so I took the test to see what I was supposed to be good for or whatever. That helped me because I kind of have a direction.” - Experienced Student

Student Suggestions on Retention

In some of these student comments, their advice on retention was not intentional; it was imbedded within the interview. Some of the comments were in response to what they would have wanted, if anything, to be included in an orientation program that would have helped them, based on their experience in college.

“I think would help would be some kind of support group because I have a girl friend, she's older than me, she's in her thirties, and I think the biggest issue with her was, she has a newborn now. I don't think it was something planned; it was unexpected. That really threw her schedule into chaos. She was not able to go to class like she needed to because she didn't have a baby-sitter, and I think having a support group to find her resources that could have helped her find her a baby-sitter would have been beneficial.

You know a support group even for myself would be helpful because if you don't know about something, you're unsure about something, or you're just finding challenges and you should be able to go to that support group and they should get the resources that

you need to say, we have this option, this option, this option. That way you have more of an option than just giving up and leaving.” - Experienced Student

“First year is the people that they meet in college. It’s not this course study, it’s not their instructors, and it’s the people that they meet. I promise you that. If I hadn’t met a few cats that just kept me motivated to come back I would have not been here either. Believe me, it’s not the will not to get this degree, it’s the people that’s here when you get here. What is their mentality when you first meet them? .” - Experienced Student

”I think the college has to want to keep the student. But I think the student has to want it badly. No matter how much the college might want the student to stay, sometimes the student doesn’t want it. I think that has to be addressed.

I think maybe it does kind of have to do with being pulled in, you know. Being made to feel like you’re cared for, not just a number. Maybe more for those students who are struggling a little bit, maybe there’ll be better ways to help them improve so that they want to stay. If you’re working at something and you’re not progressing and you’re not doing well in it, human nature is just, I’m going to give this up and do something else because you want to be good at what you do, you know. That’s self-actualization.

I think you’d really have to know each student, treat them as an individual. You can’t know every student by their first name, it’s impossible.

It's about improving their lives. You can go as far as you want. Just encouraging them and I think if they felt they were more than just a number, sitting in a seat, that they were really cared for and that it was important that they were successful." - New Student

"To get students to stay in school, I think it's just to show them how it can change their life. Maybe have examples of people that have come to school that have hit rock bottom, that have changed their lives and turned their lives around by staying in school. When some of them were discouraged, some of them were ready to give it up, I said 'wait a minute don't give it up. I've been where you've been, I know what it's like, you can do this.' So, a little bit of that, counseling." - New Student

"...weed out the bad apples. Just weed out the ones that aren't taking it seriously because they bring down the ones that are. It makes it unpleasant to go to class." - New Student

Clueless, In and About College

In the course of one interview, the topic turned to student expectations about college. In response to 'can you tell me what you expected when you started classes?' a student responded simply,

"I had no clue."

Not one of the thirty-two students interviewed stated that they had attended an orientation at SSC, although a few assumed that they had just missed or avoided it. One student concisely summed up orientation at SCC:

“You had to take a test to see what classes you qualified for. As far as freshman orientation or anything – there wasn’t.”

“I probably would have wanted to know what was available to me before I walked on campus because I’m learning more every day of what is available to me, and sometimes you learn something and like, oh well I could have used that a couple of months ago.” -
New Student

Orientation Suggestions from Students

Following are suggestions made by students as to what they thought would have helped them, if they had had an orientation. Most addressed specific issues that were of importance to them.

An Interesting Perspective

“To me the type of orientation would be just like going to employment where you’re taken around to show, this is the building of admissions, and this is where you fill out the admissions application, and this is the process that needs to take place, then to the business office...a kind of walk through procedure because SCC’s campus is large, and going from different building to building and different classroom settings, and it’s not directly numeric per se, that room one is right behind room two and that kind of thing is totally different. So, just a whole lot to inform those apprehensive students, or those 18

or 19 year old students, whose just come out of high school, and say now you aren't alone, I think." - Experienced Student

What is Expected in College

The one comment that was most frequently voiced by the students, whether they were new or experienced students reflecting back on their start of college, was that they did not know what to expect. It was the basis for the fears that they expressed and the performance issues they endured. The experienced students, for the most part, had learned what was expected and had come to an understanding of what was expected. Most of the new students were still trying to figure out what was expected. Dealing with what is expected, in its many aspects, is critical.

Expectations in General

"I knew I was supposed to make good grades, that's about it." - Experienced Student

"I probably would have wanted to know what was available to me before I walked on campus because I'm learning more every day of what is available to me, and sometimes you learn something and like, oh well I could have used that a couple of months ago." - New Student

I really don't have a clue, you know, how they came about doing what they're doing."

- New Student

“For sure a person like me, who’s been out of college for so long, I guess it would be like letting you know about the environment, more or less about your surroundings, to let you know you were going to be around a lot of younger people. But I guess that won’t fit everybody, that would just fit me.” - New Student

“One thing that I think is important is that the students understand what their responsibilities are, and that’s a big thing with me, because they are young adults who are close to my age that are coming to school, and even if they’re coming out of high school it’s their responsibility to understand what your responsibilities are. I think a lot of times they just overlook certain requirements of school, whether it be for financial aid or for academically - withdrawing from classes on a timely manner through the right channels in order to not have it adversely affect them, whether it be their GPA or financial aid status.

I think we need to fire them up a little bit. Let them realize what’s important to them? What do they want out of life? And if it’s more money, and that’s kind of sad, but there’s a lot of people here for that and that’s okay, then through education they’ll have a better life, they’ll live more comfortable, live a better life. Just get them fired up about not settling for less in life, to keep moving forward and join in instead of falling through the cracks. And that they are smart and capable. They can do anything that they set their mind to. I think there’s a lot of people who’ve been told they couldn’t and it’s kind of a hard thing to break that cycle.” - New Student

“I guess expectation. There’s a lot of students who don’t quite understand that participation and being in class is a big deal. I don’t know why they think they can only come to half the classes and make it through, and some of them may be intelligent enough to do that, but because it’s somewhat interruptive during class when the teacher has to get up there and lecture on, you need to be in class or you need to leave your cell phones some place else or turn them off. Just some kind of expectations of what the class is going to be all about to begin with. Basically that’s it. And obviously you couldn’t have all of the instructors go through all of this, but some of the basic people who know the whole system, just being able to lay down the expectations to begin with.” - New Student

Faculty Involvement: Expectations

Students wanted to meet instructors and learn what instructors expected. They did not want to wait until the first day of class.

“I would have liked to have met some of the instructors.” - New Student

“Maybe if we had gotten to meet some of the professors a little bit afterwards that were going to be in the courses that we were required to take, have them describe their classes.” - Experienced Student

“Coming to class the first few days and realizing that the teachers really do. I figured in bigger universities I don’t think the teachers care about you as much as they do in a smaller school like this because you establish more one on one relationships with the professors. And that kind of helped to ease the anxiety I had about the school, about college.” - Experienced Student

“Maybe just talk to them a week or so before the class to give me an idea of who my instructors would have been. That was kind of intimidating, I didn’t know they’d be really mean and try to scare you away and stuff like that. They’ve really been helpful more than anything.” - Experienced Student

“Maybe, for department purposes, like meet the department heads, cause every instructor’s different. You can take English - New Student three times and it would be done three different ways. And so, I mean, meeting the instructors wouldn’t have made that much of a difference, but I think meeting the department head might have because they can tell you what’s going to be expected in your major, or in general.” - Experienced Student

Lessons from Students who had Been There

Students placed a high value on learning from students who had gone through, and been successful at, what they were about to start. It is critical that the new students

be able to identify with the experienced students that are providing the information. Part of that credibility is based on similarity of life situations.

“Well, actually my best friend was already going here. So, I sort of already knew how that was with her.” - New Student

“I think that would have actually helped a lot, having somebody who would’ve told me. Keep up your grades, your grades are going to matter, you know you get that so much that you become immune to it. I mean you have people, they’re like, you gotta keep up with your grades, you gotta keep up with your grades, it’s non-stop, but nobody told me you were going to have to keep up with this yourself. You’re probably not going to know they want you to know if you have to learn it yourself. I wasn’t aware of how much work I was going to have to do in order to well in the class. Now that I’ve done it for a year and a half it’s natural, it’s no problem for me to go into a class, not know anything, and be able to do the work just because I know what I have to do to get it done now.” - Experienced Student

“If they could get students who’ve been at the school for awhile to explain their situation...I mean, not really give personal details or anything, but explain how they’ve been successful at the school and I think having the students tell them, verses administration, it would work a lot better.” - Experienced Student

“That either face to face or somehow you have more experienced students talk to the ones that are just starting.” - New Student

“I think that even if it’s not just a meeting with the teachers that it should be past students, like a big brother/big sister thing. Talk about different rules and regulations, different things that they have experienced, did stupidly and wouldn’t do again.” - Experienced Student

“I’ve got a few friends that have been to college but they’ve been to college a year or two out the high school. It would have helped me to talk to someone who had been out a decade or ten years or so and went back to school, more so than talking to someone who just hopped out of the high school and they can’t know what all the stress and what I’m expecting.” - New Student

Understanding Systems

Again, students new to higher education did not know what to expect and did not know the systems that were at work in higher education. What is simple to those who work in higher education cannot be assumed to be known to new students. They do not know the processes and how to use them. The issue is not were they told, but did they understand.

Academic Processes

“Different information about add/drop, that was something I didn’t get. There were things that I was told were in the handbook and they weren’t, or on-line. Financial aid stuff that wasn’t specifically there and that was frustrating. I didn’t even know who my advisor was until last week. I went and asked for them and someone told me.” -

Experienced Student

“They didn’t tell us. Cause I didn’t know nothing when I first came at SCC that you could drop a class, I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that you could only miss three classes in a course. I mean, they tell you in your first class, but that’s the end you hear about it. And if you’re not passing the class and you still got three days or if you’re passing the class and you done missed three days, then you fail the class. I didn’t know nothing about that. And I thought they need to explain themselves more when it comes down to the rules and the regulations and everything.

(A recruiter from a private school called recently.) And I was basically telling her I was taking such and such class (developmental courses), and would this transfer over to her college and she said no. And I mean it kind of like put a shock on me because I feel like I’m taking a class for nothing, you know. I guess it’s like a hold bed to get to where you’re trying to go.” - New Student

“Basically, I wouldn’t make it sound so much as well this is how it goes, and this is a good school to come to, and this is the program. I wouldn’t make it sound like, how can I

say this, gravy, and when I say all good I wouldn't make it sound like that because when you are a high school student you see well, they saying it's good and they're saying, you need to come to this college cause you get this money, or you get this, you don't have no reason not to come to college but you need to point out the fact that you're a college student now. And there are some consequences when you're not coming to classes and you're doing this and not doing this, there's consequences when you're not dropping a class when you're failing, there's consequences when you're not. I mean, different stuff, and when I say different stuff basically they should point out the bad, not all the good, point out the bad that can happen in college.” - New Student

In talking about what is involved in getting a degree. “I'm not even sure of what all classes I'm supposed to take. That's where I'm going to talk to now. ... I just went in and signed up, took a test and come down to register. I registered about 3 or 4 months before class. ... And I would stress the fact that if you need tutoring, get it as early as possible. These were new things that I didn't really know. I think they should have emphasized that a little more to people, like me. I guess opportunities, I'm not sure whether people around here does that cause I didn't ask that many questions, but now since I'm into it I'm beginning to ask more questions and I'm trying to find out a lot more things of what's actually going on on campus as well as off.” - New Student

Administrative Processes

“That there's just no easy route to starting, at least I didn't think so. It was a lot of go here go there, you're in the wrong place, or this is information center, there just wasn't a

defined place it seemed like that you need to start. Now there's a little bit better, being my second semester. At first there was a lot of going here and there. ... I would make sure they have an easy to follow, step by step way of going about, okay now you're out of high school, some out for college, this is the first thing that you do, second, third, fourth. That way you don't miss any bases. I think especially older people, I'm not in the realm of college that people are used to being here, I didn't know all about this FAFSA deal, you know I didn't realize how many opportunities there were for people to come back to school until I got here and talked to somebody. So if orientation would cover all those bases.” - New Student

“Where can I go to find out how to do this, how to help fill out the FAFSA. I mean the FAFSA is pretty much easy, but some of the stuff is... I don't know. ... Scholarships. I wanted help to like find out about the classes I could take, you know, especially to transfer, because that's what I'm going to do, I'm going to transfer to another school, so I wanted to know about all the classes that I needed to take to transfer. I can't think of anything else, that's about it. ...I would have liked to have met some of the instructors.”
- New Student

“The teachers give an introduction at the beginning of the first day of class and they give you a paper that doesn't really tell you about this is where you gotta get an ID or something like that.” - New Student

Tour of the College: Often Suggested in Conjunction with Other Items

Many students were intimidated by the size and their lack of familiarity with the campus. This included not only where to find buildings, but also how to find a specific classroom within a building, especially those buildings that were large or had major additions. Using experienced students as guides was suggested.

“As far as first semester goes, I would definitely have more of an orientation, maybe have a student who has volunteered for it, whose been here, who would like to tour, show people around as far as what’s available – the theatre, the student center, and what to expect as far as teachers and workload. I’m not really sure if there’s anything else that I would add to it, just to make sure that there’s enough access to I guess help, as far as like help and everything, and just make sure that those are always able to be accessed by students who need extra help.” - Experienced Student

“I know some colleges have a day that you can come visit. I was with a girlfriend that went to a college to visit and they showed her around campus and everything. I was never shown around campus. I really just signed up for classes, took the test, and they said you start this such-and-such date, and you really had to find everything on your own. So, if they’d a had some visit day where they had someone to walk you around and show you all the buildings and introduce you to some of the instructors, that would have been helpful.” - Experienced Student

“I think this school, just like any other university or anything, how they have tours and stuff like that and talk about the school and talk about the handbook and everything, like I’ve gone to ‘a major private university’ and walked around with them and they talk about what’s in this building and these certain subjects are in this building and you have your student center which has this, and this, and this. Something like that I think would be good for here and I’d give new students an outlook on where everything is and where about you’d go for certain questions or things like that, like the financial aid and the student center and stuff like that.” - Experienced Student

“One of my concerns was just finding where everything was because I was new here, and understanding what the homework load would be and the deadlines, because I’m a procrastinator so if you give me a prior deadline I sometimes have issue with getting it done.” - Experienced Student

“I think a tour of the campus would have helped.” - New Student

Other Suggestions

The more unique comments and suggestions from students:

“I never really thought about it, I mean, I just figured that’s the way it was and try to catch up, but it probably would have made a world of difference to know some things then that I know now. If it were done well and that’s easier said than done because you’ve got to be able to lay it out there without being horribly lame. Nobody wants to

see these after school special movies to where people are like, 'I've got to go study' and it's real cheesy. You'll see like these movies at high school where these people will be trying to explain the rules, like maybe say a dress code, and they'll try and make a movie of what not to do but it's so over the top and the dialogue is so incredibly cheesy, and it gets old. I mean people just make fun of that, and people don't relate well to that stuff. Just real people. I mean, I don't want to go and sit through some class, just have somebody come and talk to me. I mean like maybe in high school take 15 minutes out of the class, have somebody walk in and say, I went through this and I was not prepared and if you do this, this will help you. People who've been where I'm at, not just somebody just preaching to you about it saying, you need to do this you need to do that but tell you why. Like if you do this it will help you here, like I was sitting where you're sitting and when I got to this point I was unprepared and I had to do this, so if you'll do this now it will help you when you get there. It will help you get from point A to point B." - Experienced Student

"Knowing how to quit your work before all the, I guess you could call it peer pressure. Like everybody's telling you to go to a party and all this stuff that starts on campus, just knowing how to focus in and put your mind on your work. They should have a session in that because some people don't know that, they don't want to think about studying they'll just go party all day, because I have a lot of friends in college and they just party, party, party and their parents are paying for it and they don't realize that they have to set their priorities basically." - New Student

“Be specific about if you came up against this obstacle, what other precautionary measures that you could do to help you get through that, or what steps could you do, or who could you contact. You know, if you had a problem with this. Basically I feel like I’ve had to fend for myself or, it’s like you call one person and they’re not sure about the information or who you need to contact, so it’s kind of like playing phone tag.” -

Experienced Student

Unintended advice from Students to Administrators

Some student comments appeared to be good advice to administrators, even if the students did not intend to give advice.

“I really think for a two year college it’s important for them to understand that they’re non-traditional students, that we have to hopefully help a little bit more with single mothers who need child-care for their kids. I know there are some things done as transitions here and there’s no day care and stuff, but being an older student and coming back, it really is an amazing confidence-builder. It’s so good for a person to come back to school and realize, you know what I might be a little bit older but I can do this.” - New

Student

“I’ve always enjoyed helping people. I’ve always, like when I lived at home I helped my mom, I paid all the bills, I wrote all the checks, I helped take care of my brother, when my sister got killed I helped take care of her son. I’ve always been taking care of

somebody and helping them in any way I could, and it makes me feel better, it makes me feel good about myself, like I'm not as dumb as I think I am sometimes." - New Student

"It mostly would have to do with the environment in my opinion. They give me an environment where I feel comfortable coming in and giving what I have to give day in and day out as opposed to me feeling like I'm obligated. I'm here because I want to work. If I come here and I don't want to work and I have some other problem, I don't feel like I'm being punished or I don't feel like they're looking down on me so much, whereas in a four year college if you're working, they're going to look at you and go, why are you working? You're at college. You're going to get a job years from now, and yeah you'll do the four year stint and you will get a job when you get out but it's also important to have that work place structure while you're in school, I feel." - Experienced Student

"Sometimes you're nonchalant about it because you got no out-of-pocket expense. You know, if you get it you get it, if you don't you don't, it didn't cost you none. It's just an opportunity, you gonna blow this one off just like you blew off a lot of others, you know. And it's really up to the individual. Me, I consider, somebody's going to give me an opportunity to better myself and I'm going to take it." – Experienced Student

Concluding Comment: One to Remember

One student comment was a reminder that not all students start college with a dedication to completing. Some come to “test the waters.”

“When I first came, honestly, I was testing the waters, I was in a kind of, will I fit in, will I want to stay? I really do want to, I really do want to do this and then as I saw how I fit in, how I felt like this was a good place for me to be, how I felt it was rewarding because I was doing well in school, and being recognized in a sense. I think recognition, that’s the word, that’s the word I would use, and even for the student who maybe isn’t doing well academically, just so they get recognized for maybe something else that they’ve contribute to the school. I think everybody wants to feel like they’re recognized for who they are as a person.” - New Student

Research Question 3 - The Administrators’ Perspective

What are the community college administrators’ perceptions of the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs?

The data that specifically addresses this research question was collected through individual interviews with seven administrators at Southern Community College. All administrators interviewed were either responsible for policy or execution of policy affecting student retention. In addition to the president of SCC, they included administrators in both the academic and student services areas were interviewed. The information is formatted around the specific questions asked of each administrator.

What do you see as the purpose of student orientation and the reception to the college during the first semester or year at college? What is its goal?

The purpose or goal of the orientation provided insight into the mind-set of the administrator, the structure of the program, and the context for the orientation.

“The purpose of the orientation is to tell the student what is available to them, where things are, how college works, what’s their responsibility, what services and support are available to the student. The whole purpose of the orientation is sharing information and showing the student how they can survive and meet their education goals. I would say the goal and the purpose is the same, giving the student the knowledge and the awareness of all the resources available to them so they can meet their educational goals.”

“I think just to create a more informed student body as they’re coming into the college, to know what services are available, where to seek them out, and to encourage them to do that early. At the end of the semester it’s too late for someone to go find a tutor. ...

We have a mixed bag of students, like all community colleges, and we have people coming in with such varied backgrounds and experiences that there’s always that population who for any reason that they miss a deadline, I didn’t know, nobody told me. That’s just a standard answer you hear from students.

Our main purpose of the orientation was so that we could have informed consumers, basically, coming into the college so that they know the policies that they need to follow to be successful, whether it’s an add/drop policy, a withdrawal policy.

When students don't pay for school they don't worry about showing up for class, dropping the course, or withdrawing from it, until they get a grade report and they get an E on it, and then they're not happy, and then they want to say nobody told me. Well, we can't make them sit down and go through the catalog, everyone gets one, so what we've done is we've gone through the catalog and the different student service offices, and academic offerings, and basically hit the highlights of the things we feel students need to have affirmed the most, and those are the things we try to hit in the orientation."

"Anytime you're bringing in thousands of people into a new environment, a new system, and new policies and procedures and processes, and general information about where to go and to whom you see, you're going to save a lot of confusion and anxiety if you have them aware of when they run into these certain things here's the way you go and here's who you see and here's how you correct your lack of information or whatever you're looking for. It's a matter of opening up and connecting with the communications of the college and the policies and how we live here and so forth. The spin off from some of that, that we just said, we can do all of that on the internet if you want to but you don't have that live person there that's forming some kind of environment that they're in at the moment, to get these people in step with the institution's philosophy and that we care about them and that we're all here for that purpose, to assist them and to help them learn while they're here and gain what they came after. All of these things come together on that answer.

I think it's a coming together of the people here and the new students coming into the institution and connecting with them, building some stronger relations with them, showing them, as said, that we care about them, and that we're building something here serving them, and getting them mentally conditioned to come to school."

"I think for the experience mainly, an orientation is very necessary for new students coming into a community college. A student does not understand the policies and procedures that a college has, for instance adding or dropping a class. They don't understand a lot of the terminology used at the college, such as the number of credit hours per class, and coming into SCC they could be the first in their family ever to be at college so that even their parents wouldn't even know. It's a way to connect to the college that you're going to and, to me, it's a very valuable retention tool.

So it feels like there is someone or political people that feel like they want them there, even if it's a recruiter. It makes them feel like somebody shows some interest and wants them to be successful in their career at SCC.

The goal is to familiarize them with academic terms, with the policies and procedures, with the academics and what instructors expect from a new student...just an overall picture of the campuses, what resources are available to them whether it's financial, academic, housing, and a combination of all of these.

The only reason our orientation is a 'have-to' is because it's a performance indicator of the State. I have really been wanting an orientation for the last 15 years, and this is the closest, other than the 1-on-1. But of course at times when we're real busy,

those people that waited until the last 2 or 3 weeks, they didn't get that 1-on-1 orientation like they should. But anyway, I've been working on trying to get orientations and advising systems and the whole bit for 10 or 15 years. It's a fight, but this performance indicator is a State required indicator, and that is why we have it or we wouldn't have gotten it."

"Student orientation is the time to do just that. It's to orient the student to the institution in a number of different areas. I think that an orientation is an introduction to the whole process of higher education. Everything from when you have students come on campus for the first time, students register for the first time, it could be an admission process, go through the counseling process, go through the financial process. To me orientation implies giving those students the knowledge and process to make that happen.

I think certainly you could look at it on an extended basis but kind of the way I'm looking at it is I'm thinking you have maybe a two or three day orientation period. I think that happens in the four-year institutions more so than the two year. As a freshman, you're invited to come to campus, you're not only invited you're required, and in a lot of those situations there are some prerequisite reading or studying or whatever that you're asked to do. And I think the way I see that is that's certainly the bulk of the orientation process. A lot of times you cannot retain all of this stuff that's thrown at you maybe in those two days. So, I would say that the orientation process is a progressive thing that happens probably throughout the entire first semester. And what that's doing is you're becoming familiar with the process of how to do everything, so when the second

semester rolls around you're much more capable of getting through the system without having to have somebody hold your hand. And I think that process works good."

"I think from an administrator, the goal is to keep the students here. From the goal of the student, it's to finish. When the two of us have the same goal, then we have great success. For a student to start something and not be able to complete it, for some reason, is very disheartening. Most students that come to a community college, this is not their first choice, this is their last resort. That's not for everyone, that doesn't mean everyone but out of say 12,000 students here at SCC, I would say probably half of them, at least, have had a very bad experience somewhere else, and that's a conservative estimate. They've been beaten up in high school, middle school, maybe even in grammar school, and so life has not been good as far as their memories of education; they have not had a good experience. Some of that is built in to where they grew up, their parents didn't have good experiences, or had no experience, and so college was this unattainable thing out there that only the rich and famous were allowed to get into, and so there was no access for them.

That kind of oppressive environment is where a lot of our students have grown up. We're in a former factory environment here where just about everybody and the blue-collar workers made their living in the industry. Most of these young people who have come out of that environment have had parents, grandparents, great-grandparents who never even finished high school. If they finished high school, it was just because they were athletes, or they just happened to like school, but they went immediately to

work in the factories. We are seeing the third and fourth generation of those people, with that background, coming into the college system. It's almost like the cycle of poverty where the cycle has not been broken, and we're trying to break that.

Having said that, it is very important for the first 30 seconds to be positive when they step onto a college campus, because several things have happened before they've gotten here. They've either lost a job - where they were making minimum wage or had some skills, sort of on the job training type thing - they either lost that job, or they have, because they didn't finish high school or only finished high school, can't get a good job. Plus all of the other dynamics of divorce and broken families and lots of kids and mortgages and car payments and all of that are in play. They can't make it with the skill set they've got, and they've got to get more.

Going to college is the only place they can get it, and we're inexpensive, and we're available, and we're here. And so they come here.

Very important for that first experience when they walk in the door to be positive because otherwise, they're saying, as they're getting out of their car, I shouldn't be here but I'm going to try. They come in and if they're not treated in a respectful manner, if things don't go well - and, of course, as we know they don't always go well even for the most well-intentioned students.

But I think that's the point at which we either lose them or we keep them. And that whole year is that important. I think orientation, originally, is a means to try and make people comfortable and feel where they are and kind of know their surroundings."

“The initial purpose of student orientation is to let the students know that they’ve made the right decision, and to orient them to the facilities at the college and to begin the process of them developing relationships that can help them persist.

Also to help them identify significant others which, research shows, helps students with retention as well. The way I see it, that initial orientation is to help students recognize that they’ve made the right decision, to welcome them into the college, and then during that initial semester to get comfortable with the college experience, learn more about the college experience.”

How do you orient your new students to your college and to the college experience?

And by “orient” I mean the whole reception to the college during the first semester or year at college?

During the period of data collection, SCC transitioned from a one-on-one orientation briefing by a counselor to an on-line orientation. This was put into effect with the registration for Fall, which began March 29, 2004. These administrator interviews were in April 2004 and therefore SCC was in a transition period.

“We had what was called the START Center, and acronym for Student something, something success. And basically what happened is, there was a group of people in a large room upstairs that every first-time student would sit down one-on-one with one of those START Center advisors and that person would orientate the student one-on-one.

They'd tell them where the library was, talk to them about the reading center and the math center, talk to them about where the various offices were, etc., etc. Well, that was fine when the institution was 6 or 7 thousand students. It was clear that with as many students coming in, there was no way that little START Center could continue to do one-on-one orientation and we began talking about other ways to do orientations.

One of the things we wanted to do was put orientations on-line or burn them on a CD, and/or do group orientations and things like that. We put that on hold until we built the new admissions and registration center. Now, what is supposed to occur, the students sit down at a computer terminal and the orientation to the college is an interactive on-line process. Whether or not it's been completed and whether or not it's going on, I don't know because I don't have responsibility for orientations. But at this institution that's what it's all about. I'm not aware of any other activities that are planned or coordinated in the first year for those new students.

Actually, the plan was to use both on-line and group orientations. The plan was to use that large meeting room in the center of the building as a place for orientations for people who preferred face-to-face. But recognizing more and more the students that we're seeing are comfortable with the computer environment and are sensitive to their time, we came up with the idea that that would be a very convenient way to provide that information to students."

“We recently purchased software and we built our own on-line orientation. Each year we have to identify performance indicators for the college, so this was our performance indicator and it will be measured over the next two years.

First we said we would develop it, that was the first part of our indicator, secondly that we would have new students be required to use it, and that we would increase the percentage of students using it on-line each year. When we opened registration on March 29th for Summer and Fall semester, we had already put our rules in the computer that any new student being admitted for Fall had to do orientation before they could register. I was working in the lab those first few days and students were coming through.

We would sit them down and we had all the PC's set so that it comes right up to the home page, that's the opening page on the PC, and we've got our on-line orientation button right there, tell them to click on it. They go through, it's very interactive and we have done a wonderful job of putting active links in the orientation that takes them back out into our web site and other pages so that all the information is updated in one place, so it's always accurate. You don't have three different places where you have to update information, sometimes they disagree.

So the students were very happy with that, that they could link to one place and get all their questions answered. At the end we have a quiz and they have to pass with a score of 7 out of 10 to complete orientation successfully. We only had one student who had to take it more than once, and that's out of 300+ students the first day. So I thought that was pretty good.”

“I think it’s a coming together of the people here and the new students coming into the institution and connecting with them, building some stronger relations with them, showing them that we care about them, and that we’re building something here serving them, and getting them mentally conditioned to come to school. When I first entered a university, to be honest, I don’t remember too much of orientation. I had to matriculate, stand in line, get registered, get my courses, pay my dues, get my room set up in the dorm, but I don’t remember appearing in some formal group that briefed me on the policies of the college, what we expect of you and what you can expect of us type thing, and so forth.

I think that’s done, probably, since I don’t work right in that area. I do know that that goes on. In many cases that goes on at the division level and the deans and the instructors and all in that division. For instance, the medical division, where you have numerous curriculums and nursing and all types of medical technician training going on, that’s where they do a lot of that. You don’t have a massive get-together of all incoming students in one area. We don’t have one area that would hold them. I think it would be done by those divisions, deans, department heads, and people in that section of the college.”

“In 1955 we started what’s called the START Center, which stood for Student Advising Registration Team. At that time we had a one-on-one orientation and we used a booklet that we went over with them individually before we advised them. Now we have switched because of the number of students we have to work with, we’ve increased

almost up to 13,000 students, and we are doing online orientation. After a student has tested and completed the admission requirements, they can do this at home or at the school. It's an online orientation.

Now we have a one stop shop where a new student could come in, go through admissions, go through testing if applicable, go to advising and registration and/or orientation, go to the business office and pay or apply for financial aid, go to the bookstore, buy their books, and show up for classes the first day; and be done all at one time and in one place."

Researcher: Is there anything else that's done other than the online orientation that deals with the new student experience?

"Not at this time. Each individual division sometimes has orientations for that particular division. Some of the health sciences have what they call career talks informing them about their particular program, but as far as an overall picture, this is our main focus right now."

"I don't know that I could describe that completely. From the experience I've had so far in that is that we started our intake process a week ago and I'm not knowledgeable to the point that we have a formal orientation where we call students on campus and we talk to them. I don't know whether we do that or not. I know that the student, when they come into our process, when they come into our admissions registration center they are guided through that maze of things. You know, you've got to go in and do the admissions, you got to do the testing, you've got to go through the advising, you've got to go through the

financial aid. All of those or part of that, I guess that would be our orientation or admission process. I don't think we have a big process thing."

"We've never had a real orientation since I've been here (over ten years) where you gather all the chickens in the hen house and give them all the same medicine, we've never done that. When I went to a state university as an undergraduate, we did that. We had "orientation" just before you went to register, and they put everybody in the gym or football stadium and told everybody, the bathrooms are in this direction and you're registering over here.

But only in this year right now in March, have we done a real orientation for every student, that is required, and now it is on tape, on line, and it is pretty comprehensive, it tells you everything about the college. It'll be interesting to see how that plays out and if students, in about six months when we survey them, find out if they felt like it was a pain or if it really helped."

Researcher: Is there anything else that's done in the first semester or first year experience to orient students or that is part of the reception process?

"We have some receptions – punch and cookie thing. We do several of those. At the branch campuses we're able to give a little more 1-on-1-customer service; we don't have it here on the main campus because there's so many people. We have drinks and donuts the first days of school, and a big sign that says "Welcome back students" – which we do on main campus too but I don't think we do the donuts and coffee and cookies in the afternoon, but we do that at the branch campuses. At Thanksgiving, we have what is

called Thankfurter Day, and that's usually on the Thursday before we break for Thanksgiving and we have free hot dogs and drinks for everyone."

"Well at SCC we have a program here that focuses on orienting the students to the college, they developed a, I think it was a video that helped students become a little more knowledgeable about the campus. Now I can't remember but I think it was in our advising center, I believe it was. Now that process of orienting the students is a little different than what I've traditionally seen because my background is four-year colleges and of course somewhere else, so I don't know that that was necessarily representative of what you might see at other two year colleges but it wasn't necessarily what I was used to seeing, but it seems to help students feel comfortable."

How well do you think your orientation and reception processes are doing in meeting your purpose and goals for the orientation?

The responses are divided into subjective and objective measures, based on the description by the interviewees.

Subjective Evaluation

"I really don't know. I haven't gotten any feedback or information from student affairs as far as what works and what doesn't work, so I couldn't really tell you how well it's doing."

“I think it’s working well. It’s very accessible. People can do it from home; they can do it from a computer lab here on campus. We’ve got it set up in our testing lab, so when a new student comes in and their testing for math, English, and reading placement, as soon as the test ends the home page comes up and they can go into the orientation there.”

Researcher: Do you have a way of tracking how many have gone to the hot links to read in-depth about things?

“No. We have a new web master and that is one thing I would like him to do so that we can see how many links they go to and get a count there from the orientation, other than just counting off of the main page. That’s the only thing we have available now, but when we get this new web master fully operational that’s something I would like to look into.”

Researcher: Can you tell me about how well do you think the reception of new students is doing?

“Again, I’m pretty happy with what I’m seeing so far. When we started designing this new facility, we tried to make it high-touch, high-technology, and a very easy system for students to flow through. So I think orientation naturally fits in this location because we try and remember that this is student-centered service. So, orientation just fit naturally into that same formula. When they leave here and they’re finished and they hit the classroom door, I think that we need something to tie up back together at that point, because we’ve moved them to student, we’ve registered them, we’ve told them what to do, how to do, when to do, and then we push them off on the academic side. I think there still needs to be some passing back and forth.”

“We have had a couple of focus groups of new students that have come in and they have been very responsive and think it’s an excellent idea, and they’ve learned a lot from the on-line orientation. There are a couple of things they wish they did know, and we’re getting to work with the software person. The students want to know if they missed any questions (during the online orientation) and which questions they were. Right now we can’t tell them, we don’t know which ones they missed unless we went back in on an individual basis and went over the questions with the student. Students don’t seem to mind the questions. They like the questions because it reinforces things they should definitely remember.”

“I’m not sure we’re doing what we should. I think we’ve got an opportunity to improve, and the reason that I say that is a couple of things, I think we’re limited in what we actually do now.

The other issue is that we have a large number of students that come in and actually fill out an application, pay a registration fee, and we never hear from them. Up until just recently, we really had not put any effort into following up on those students, but we’re beginning to do that. I think that if we had maybe more of a formal orientation process where we had more contact with these students, we might be able to recruit some of those 2500 or get them into the process. I don’t know whether they all end up going some where else, or they just don’t go anywhere, or what happens to those, but we’re beginning to call those people and find out why they had enough interest to come in and

fill an application out, pay their money, but didn't show back up. So, we're looking to do a research thing."

"I think they work great at the branch campuses because they really get good customer service. That's my goal is to have that same level of customer service here with a lot more students going through."

"It's hard for me to judge, I guess I should say first from the outside because I've never participated in the process. Now at the previous two institutions that I worked at, I actually worked in orientation. I was assistant director at one, and I was the director of orientation at another for at least one year, my last year there. I don't know that our orientation is offering the complete orientation package that we need for the students. I mean, I think the information is there, but I don't know. I guess the best answer is I really don't know if overall the experience is as helpful as it should be.

Actually, for many of our students it maybe all they think they need for not having that experience orientation anywhere else, they don't necessarily know what a thorough student orientation program should include.

So, in that sense I think it's effective in terms of meeting the perceived needs of the students. However, overall I think that we could do a better job of helping the students to identify a significant other or taking them on tours to show them what buildings they'll go to after they get the schedule in their hand. A lot of times, at the start of the semester, we actually have people out in the hallways to help students know where

to go because they don't know, they'll say where is building 103. So, they don't even feel comfortable with the physical location of the facilities.”

“The way I answer that is, how many complaints come through this office about it. I can take several subjects here at the college and if you put it on a scale, that would be down very low for complaints. I don't know that I've had hardly any in that area. But sooner or later, in this kind of education, if the system itself is not performing, be assured that those students will get to this office somehow. They will get here, and that's not anything but good as far as I'm concerned, because I wouldn't know it otherwise.”

Objective Evaluation - Data

“We did have a process for tracking retention rates in our old computer system. We do not have those views in the new one, which we have had two years, going on three.”

“The college is required to collect data for IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System), and that is first-time, full-time student retention, and we collect that every year and have to report it to the feds, but that's it. It's only those first-time, full-time students that we track. Those are the ones that are tracked at the end of 150% of their program, and that's a federal requirement, but beyond that I don't think anything institution-wide is being tracked. In individual department, like engineering, they're tracking.”

“...we lose 30 to 35% from Fall to Spring.”

Researcher: Can you tell me how do you know that?

“That is what the statistics have shown over the years from the system.”

Researcher: I thought you weren't keeping the statistics now?

“Well, we don't keep them unless somebody individually goes in and does it. In other words, I've done it a couple of times, because I'm friends with the computer system whose over the IT Department, and I've gotten one of his people to go in and check to see, okay we had this many students that registered for classes and how many of those students actually returned the next semester. It was somewhere between 30 and 35% did not return. It varies each semester. We've just done it from Fall to Spring mainly. Somebody did it one year, I think, from Spring to Summer, but I don't think we've ever done a whole year. But to me it's probably somewhere between 25 and 35% don't come back.”

How do you think retention can best be facilitated at your institution?

This section contains the administrators' comments on how to have an effective New Student Orientation program at SCC. Incorporated within it are many of the comments on student. Other aspects of retention are addressed under separate sub-headings.

“Well, I think the literature shows, and it's common sense, that the more the student understands about all the resources are at the campus to help them, the better they're

going to be able to achieve their goals, and I think that it's incumbent upon the institution to take responsibility for making sure that every student knows what help is available.

I'm a proponent of orientation to college course. It does for them is what an orientation should to. It shows them where the library is, walks them around, let's them meet different people, so that's another way. You start adding all those things up and before you know it you've got a dozen or so strategies, and you start collecting data and pretty soon you start seeing your retention rate starts to go up, and that's what the institution needs to do. It needs to be a bunch of little things to really impact.

You know you code the applications and you know who the first-time students are. They're coded in Datatel and there needs to be a process that reaches out to those first-time students, in a proactive manner, to connect with them. With the internet, and all students issued email accounts, and access to computers everywhere and anywhere, you can do that, it's a little easier to do now."

"I think the first thing that we need to emphasize is insisting that faculty do student advising. I'm familiar with retention literature and knew that to the extent students feel connected with the institution they're likely to be retained, so each faculty member is supposed to have at least 40 students assigned to them. Developing a process where those faculty are checking up or communicating with those 40 students is a way to impact retention.

Putting in place campus cruiser, web advisor, having all faculty communicating with their students via e-mail, I think that's going to do something for student retention,

and I think there are other strategies faculty and staff can do, mentoring, things like that, to impact student retention. There's a bunch of little things that collectively would make a big difference.

Some of the deans are doing definite things to improve retention: in one area, the department heads have a list of every student that's in every one of their classes. Every student gets coded as a particular major and every summer those personal phone calls are made to every one of those students to find out why they haven't enrolled yet and figure out if there are any problems, etc. So that personal contact from the department head goes on. Some department heads send personal letters to every single student to make sure things are going well and they're enrolling in classes. Some programs block enroll, in other words, all the students are moved through the program as a cohort, and that's a great retention activity because they create a camaraderie as a cohort and those make it easier to retain students."

"I like an orientation; I think it's helpful, especially for our students because many of them are first generation college students. They don't have a parent or a sibling to tell them what to expect, we're their first contact. ...

My biggest complaint of the way we do business now is that everyone wants to push you toward technology. They want you to grow your student body but because they give you a new computer system, you ought to be able to do more with less, and when it comes to informing students and leading them through life-decisions like this, that's not always possible. Not even practical in some cases.

Years ago, every student that came through here sat down with an admissions counselor, and we had 30 minute appointments. I met with the students, I met with mom and dad, they'd bring the whole family; you were educating the whole family. They understood. At that point I could tell them, don't worry about starting out in this math because when I went to college I did the same thing. ...

At the counter in admissions now, you almost want to say, after you talk to them, 'do you want fries with that?'

You can't do this, you've got to sit down and spend some time with those students and I think that's what's missing is that in-take counseling. You hope it's going to take place at advising but, when you get busy and there's that bottleneck, all they're looking for is CPT 101 and what section is open. You know, boom, boom, boom, put a schedule together, and I think students are missing that whole philosophical discussion about this is where you are, this is where you're going to be, these are the stepping stones, but this will get you there.

In all of the financial award letters that they've signed, they say I've read this and it's been explained to them. But again, it's that no one sat down with them, and I think we're missing that. And I don't care how much automation you have, I don't care what wonderful computer system you have, you cannot take away that in-take orientation where you sit down one-on-one and say, 'this is going to happen; you come talk to me when it does, you're going to encounter this, these are your road blocks.' You know, they're not going to read."

“Whether it’s student mentoring, faculty mentoring, even getting volunteers from the community from different areas of business to come in and get some mentoring programs set up. Some of our students have never seen a successful college graduate in the work force. They haven’t had that modeled at home. They need that model. I can do a lot and I can teach somebody how to be a computer programmer, but unless I teach them the soft skills to keep a job once they graduate, my job’s not complete. If they don’t learn the soft skills, the people skills, the work ethics, and things that can only be shown to them from modeling. So I really feel strongly about this mentoring process.”

“I think to really do it well and do it right, having a little mini-workshop on it probably wouldn’t have much of an impact on it, I think they’ve done all that and so forth, but that right there at that level must be on the shoulders of the department heads.

If the department head fails in any way to encourage staying in school, and if they’re not there some morning get on those telephones and find out why they’re not there. Call them. If necessary, go see them. If you want to do it right, you’ve got to get down on that level in order to communicate directly with the people who are dropping out.

For instance, how in the world would somebody over in the engineering area know that somebody had missed class for 4 or 5 consecutive days and missed 2 tests and already the indicators was showing that they were getting ready to drop out. How would they even know it? But that department head sits there and looks at it everyday and he knows a lot about the students, and if he sees any signs of dropping out, he needs to have

a conference with that student and find out why, what is it, how can we help you, is it money, is it text books, is it scholarships? Just what is causing your problem? Most of the time they're domestic, most of the time, not all the time, they're health related. They're job related. They're related to being transferred from one city to another. Getting married. All those personal things students get involved with, families, parents, et cetera."

"The advising system is one of the most important after the orientation. Of course, a lot has to do with the instructors. To me they have an enormous affect on students when it comes to retention. Instructors can make students feel like they care that they're there and that they want them to pass and want them to succeed. It's a combination of everybody, from the beginning to the end, department heads and everybody needs to check on these students when they're going through their academic years, but it's very hard to do this at a community college.

Because at a community college you've got your outside family, you've got work, and you're juggling your family, work, and school sometimes. Our average age is about 26, 27, and yes we do have them straight out of high school, we also have them 20, 30, 40, 50 years old. Community college is just a whole different ballgame than a four-year college where they live on campus, or even if they live off campus they're still directly connected with sports, and clubs and organizations.

Even though we do have clubs and organizations, at four-year colleges they're just more involved because they have the time to do it and many of our students don't

have the time. We do have a few that always participate in activities. We do have the honor students. But it's not the majority. The majority is the person who has a family, work, and they're trying to go to school.

Students have trouble adjusting to college. Being that a lot of these students are first time college in their family, they don't have anyone at home to be able to tell them and relate to them, and also we hand-hold them that first semester, which to me is part of the education process is to be responsible for your own actions. Instructors tell them, but are they listening? In fact, some instructors tell them, if you miss more than two times you're going to get an F, they just flat out tell them, unless you have a medical or legitimate excuse.”

“I think that retention is historically a major challenge in lots of institutions of higher learning. I think the way we count and keep score here inherently makes the numbers look poorly, as far as the retention rates. I think that what we could do is that we probably need to have a closer relationship with the students, and I'm not exactly sure how we do that. I think that when a student comes into the system, some students come in they don't require much attention, they're pretty street smart and can maneuver the system, ask what questions they need to ask, and move on. There are other students that come into the system that need a lot more hands on.”

“Be nice to people, make them feel like they’re important, that they’re not doing you a favor by coming here; that you really want their business. There’s competition all around and you want theirs, and you want it badly enough to be nice to them.

You answer the phone, you return phone calls, you greet them with a smile, you push down all the barriers that keep people from registering, you get the darn transcript and you do something with it, and you don’t keep them from registering because something in the snail-mail didn’t get it there. You make all the allowances for them, you help them with financial aid, you make that process as easy as it can be, and you just basically have good customer service. If you don’t have good customer service, it doesn’t matter how much of anything else you do, people will come, they will bite the bullet, and they’ll go through it one time and if they can find any place else to go, that’s where they’ll be.

It’s absolutely a matter of customer service. You’ve got to offer people what they want. You’ve got to have a good selection and flexibility and all those things, but having said all that, just about everybody does that. In a community college setting, you’ve got classes all day and all night, weekends, online, videotape, every possible delivery you can have, flex schedules, branch campuses all over the service area.

It’s there, we’ve already knocked down those barriers, but when they walk in the door, be nice to them, ask a question. Do they want to come back? Do they look forward to coming or is it like having a root canal?”

“First, I think we need to identify some students who have the ability to relate to individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and so on so forth. Basically to be able to relate to the students who we have coming to this institution, and especially those who are trying to come here for more than just one course, those going full time, especially. I think that a good orientation program would include a student orientation team, because students can learn so much from students and they feel a lot of times more comfortable asking questions of students.

I also think on the other side, we need to have parental orientation, we need to offer some type of orientation for the parents who have so many questions about their son or daughter coming to school here. A lot of them are paying the money, but not just that, we have a lot of first generation college students, so individuals who would likely benefit from being able to, say, learn more about what they can and cannot expect from the college.

You know, I’ve run into parents several times and said, hey look I need to know how my son or daughter is doing in class, they don’t understand why we can’t share that information with them. They have questions about financial aid and so forth.

So, I think a rounded program that addresses the parental orientation, the student orientation, and I think again having courses that can help us learn more about the college experience or maybe just a course on, ah, we used to have a course at another institution where students participated in something that was a pretty generic topic, but it was used as a way to help the students get comfortable with study habits, where to go for what, how do you do research on your college campus, where’s the library, or what do you do

with this online situation now in terms of trying to get, pool resources together for projects, etc.

So, there are so many different things that need to be included in an orientation that I think maybe at this point we've not included."

"Help the students to find a person on campus, be it an advisor, someone who's advising them academically, or some person serving as an advisor for a student organization, or a work study, a supervisor; someone on campus that individual feels comfortable talking to about issues as they arise. And just feel like they have a good enough relationship with, period, in terms of having someone they know they could say, look I need to talk to Joe about this because I know him. And that's why you see sometimes people running into my office left and right because they happen to know me."

Researcher: So, can you tell me how you facilitate the student in finding that individual?

"By getting faculty and staff involved in orientation, I think. And by educating faculty and staff about the importance of student learning opportunities, such as work study programs and by trying to utilize these student's skills. By utilizing these students then we can help them develop skills and we also have to develop relationships. It's hard to work for someone and not have some type of relationship, and I think the students look for relationships with faculty and staff members who are friendly, who they feel are fair, and a lot of the things that we also look for in individuals as professionals.

And we have to demonstrate that on a daily basis around our college campus because there will be some students who will not necessarily want to be a part of a student organization, may not participate in a work study program, or any of the other programs that strategically should be set up on a college campus.

But, if you're friendly enough when you see individuals out and you speak to them and make them feel that they can be comfortable with yourself, then you might develop relationships by walking past one in the hall and then having a question or asking for directions, and then they remember you and they see you the next time and they say, 'hey you the guy or the lady who helped me, I have another question.' You build relationships from there."

"Well, that's when we count on the experts; how do we help them to learn how to study? Or how do we deal with it? Well, that's where a good orientation program, and I think if we've got the right remedial program here, which I believe we do, then I think we can help the students become more familiar with the process overall.

And I use myself as an example. When I initially started college, I didn't need remedial courses, but I struggled in some of the courses because college life, the college experience, the pace of the courses, and what we were actually covering was all new to me, and so I ended up needing a tutor. And with a tutor first sitting down and trying to help, first I think the tutor made an assessment of me. They looked over what mistakes I was making and then they said, 'okay I think I see a pattern here. Let me show you how to look at that differently.' Then they explained it to me and then I understood and I went

from making two F's in the first two tests to making two A's on the next two tests and then went on to making a B in the course.

So I think understanding, especially when we see a high-risk population coming in, we have to hold their hands a little bit more than we do some of the other students.

I think that learning curve, about how to deal with college period, can be quite long for some students, if they even get it at all. So the sooner we can address that, the better.”

“I think that fear of academic failure, that's what a good orientation program should include. We ought to have some sessions where we talk about the classroom experience. You know, what should you expect in the classroom?

Okay, now, what if I'm the kind of student who has a fear of failure, what do I do? And then we ought to have workshops designed for those students. We need to have programs in place where we help students to understand that you can be successful, given your aptitude is at a certain level, you can be successful here at the college, but these are some things that can help make you a C student instead of a student who struggles making F and D's.

Also, I've learned over the years, a lot of students who use academic support are some of the brightest students who are B students who are trying to get to be A students, and so they're interested in new ways of looking at material or trying to learn material as well. So, I think that's a responsibility of the college.”

Registration's Direct Effects

Some of the comments by administrators addressed the impact and importance of the registration process.

“It’s human nature, I guess, for people to wait till the last minute, so normally in the Fall, three weeks before classes begin, we do not have the staff to handle the flow of students and, therefore, they do not get the individual attention that they should get with the explanations and reasons for being here. That’s why we’re hoping the (on-line) orientation will help a little bit because we’re going to make them do it. They’re going to have to take that 10 or 15 minutes to go through it.”

“A more structured registration period where you identify specific periods of time when specific types of students do their registration, and you do early registration for returning students, and new students. There needs to be more structure, right now it’s all open. All the students know they can wait till the last second and they can register. There’s no incentive for anyone to change their behavior. That would help that bubble effect where everybody tries to register at the same time. Then there’s no time for orientation, there’s not time for sharing information, all there’s time to do is to sign the person up, print out a bill, and get them to pay.

“At the counter in admissions now, you almost want to say, after you talk to them, ‘do you want fries with that?’

Mandatory or Voluntary Orientation

Many of the administrators favored a mandatory orientation program, even beyond the on-line orientation. However, key administrators did not.

“I’m a proponent of orientation to college course. There are a lot of institutions that make that mandatory. Many times it’s only a one credit hour course, it’s offered before the start of the semester, and students are required to take that course, and what it does for them is what an orientation should to. It shows them where the library is, walks them around, let’s them meet different people, so that’s another way.”

“We have had discussions for several years and at one point we had College 101 and College 103, a skills orientation-type class. And we have some very extreme opinions on both sides. There are those of us who would like to see a mandatory orientation, and others who recognize the student population that we have, you’re just not going to get them to take an extra class unless it’s required for their graduation program. And even with some of our faculty, they don’t want to put an extra class in there if it’s going to deter their student’s graduation.”

“I would put in a mandatory 3 credit hour college experience skills that would include your orientation plus college skills, time management, and all that. I would then be sure that each individual student on the academic advising side of the house would have an academic advisor and there would be an academic advising system set up to follow that

student all the way through to graduation. And, of course, counselors play an important part in that because if the advisor feels like the student is having academic problems, family problems, emotions problems; whatever, they could send them on to a counselor.”

In reference to transition to college and understanding academia an administrator stated: “That’s where good orientation should be mandatory, I think, for some students if not for all. They’d probably shoot me if I said for all here, but I’d say for students here, some may label as high risk, or those who really need those remedial courses. We need to orient them and answer the questions that they’re saying. Hey, they need answers too.”

“I’m saying provided they want it and need it, but don’t make them go.”

Student Expectations

Interviews with students revealed that most students did not know what to expect or what was expected of them when they started community college. The administrator comments on this issue were varied.

“I would think they couldn’t have gotten through the system without being told. Whether they absorbed it or not and heard it or listened. Maybe the communication was poor or something. For instance, they come through there and they want to be a nurse and they didn’t even finish high school, that’s the state law whether they’ve had English or math in high school or not they’ve got to finish the achievement level of the 12th grade. They’re told that. Because they didn’t have that background and foundation and previous history

of coming through the system and doing well and being guided through the system. These folks have been in a world not even close to that.”

“Resources that are available to students. They’re all in there in the online orientation. They may have to go back and look and detail on some of these resources to see what they are.

But, an orientation is more of an overall picture, and for details you can go back in on the web. They can find out a lot more detail that we don’t want to give them because they don’t have time coming into school during the entrance and everything they have to do before they can be ready to go to class because of the volume of students coming in.

It’s hard for them and that’s why I think they need more than just an orientation, but that’s something that your attention span can’t put too much more on that or you’re gonna lose them anyway.”

“I think that that kind of information needs to come from a variety of sources. They need to be assaulted with that information from a variety, you know from their instructor, from their advisor, from the admissions people, from everyone they talk to needs to be in a position to say, ‘all of these services are available to you and if you’ve got any questions the web site has it.’ You’ve just got to attack it on all fronts.”

“I can identify with that myself, cause when I started my master’s program I’d been out of college for a long time. I was asking myself, am I going to be successful in these classes and I know that I was a mediocre student in undergraduate and I thought here I am taking on a graduate level program and I had no idea of what to expect. I was very frightened and concerned the first classes that I went into, but after you get that first class under your belt and you do very well in it, and you take the second one and you do equally as well, then you begin to build that confidence.

But that doesn’t happen automatically, and I think that that fear can cause a lot of people not to get into the process. They think they want to do it and they make all the preparation to do it, but when it gets down to going to the class, something happens and they don’t make, and I think that’s a very real possibility and I can see how that could happen easily.

What helped me were the counselors and the faculty that I had. I think the thing that helped me was the encouragement I had from some of the faculty. It was from the very beginning ‘ hey you will do well in this.’ And I looked around at some other people and I thought well some of these other people have gone through this program and been successful, I don’t know why I can’t do it.

I don’t know how the college could make that transition easier. I think it would have to be a partnership with the high schools, with the secondary education system.

They’ve got to understand, or begin to understand, that when you leave there and go to a higher learning institution, things are going to be different. You’re going to be treated pretty much like the adult you wanted to be treated and you’re going to have the

responsibility and accountability for your actions, and that'll be demonstrated to you in your performance, in your courses."

Study Skills

"I have a solution but it's never been accepted and that is, we require students that test into developmental to take a one-hour study skills and "orientation" kind of course where they learn how to use the library, they learn study skills, they learn techniques in taking notes, test-taking skills, and all of that. We offer that class as an option, and it is a one-hour class, but we should require it for those who are taking developmental.

Here's why we don't. We're already requiring them to take developmental courses that will not transfer anywhere, will not get them anywhere so to speak, in terms of hours counting. We're taking their money, we're requiring them to take 3 maybe 6 hours of course work that's not going to go anywhere, and then we add another one-hour course, more money, more time added to that and it's like, 'you're just like a sponge, you're just taking my money, I'm not getting anywhere, and I'm just treading water.'

But a friend of mine down at PDQ Community College, who was the president down there, who is now at another community college, but anyway before he was president, he was over the division of developmental and they did require it for two years, and their retention rate went boom, out the roof.

If people had study skills, and if they knew how to take tests, and they knew how to take notes, and knew how to listen in class, they would have been successful and would not be in developmental courses, they would have gotten it the first time.

I say there are few exceptions, people have been out of school for 25 years or something, they may just need a little brush-up, but I'm talking about the people that are really grinding away at arithmetic and can't get it, and they have a long way to go. Those people need desperately all of the above, the study skills, the test-taking skills, the note-taking skills, the listening skills, learning how to use a tape-recorder, knowing where to sit in the class room, knowing how to interact with the instructor to get as much as you can get. They don't have that and, therefore, they get discouraged quickly and a lot of them never come back."

"We recommended a study skills course. Two or three of us went down with the freshman year experience in the capitol city where State University has been "known" in this area for their course. We came back and recommended to the administration. For one year they did have a couple of classes of a one-credit hour course, but to me a one-credit hour course is not detailed enough. It's not enough time to put everything you need to know in that freshman year experience. They did have maybe one or two sections of the three credit hour of college skills course, but they did away with it because they say they couldn't afford to pay the instructors to teach so it was dissolved. They said it was a financial issue; I think it was political.

The counselors were teaching it at one time, which I think they're an excellent source to be the ones to teach it but they decided they didn't want to teach it anymore because they were not being paid to teach it; they were doing it as part of the job. It goes back to the pay. What's more important, retaining your students or paying the extra cost

for the job, and then of course the academics are saying they cannot add anymore courses the their curriculum. So how do you get students to take it? There's that side of it too."

"When I got out of high school and went to college, I didn't know how to study. And what I think the college can do there is I think there ought to be some type of course that every kid has to take, every person who goes through the process has to take which addresses that specific issue. How do you use your time, how do you study, you know, and what is the process of studying? It's not the same for everybody, how do I learn how do you learn, and part of that process has to be helping you figure out how you learn, and I think that would be time well worth the effort. Because it would help you be able build that good foundation your freshman year, and I think a lot of kids enter and they don't know how to study. They don't know how to figure out what's the most important issues, and why do I need to learn this, because if I learn this then it helps me understand this. And I think there's a bit of a deficiency there."

"I didn't learn to study until I was working on my master's. I coasted through high school, I studied twice in college that I can remember, and that was it. Again, I think that's where student services and academics can join forces and work together because with our diverse population, faculty have got to realize that the demographics in that classroom are a lot different than at State University or anywhere else, and they've got to pay more attention to those social learning styles and things like that. And when we have academics offering more of these study group sponsored type things, I think students will

get involved in that, I think they do well. You especially see that in the health areas, where those students band together because they know if they don't make it, they're out of clinical rotation, and you'll see them banded together in the library, the canteen, anywhere."

"We've held classes here, on study skills. I don't know if we're doing that right at the moment, but we have in the past."

Developmental Course Students

"As far as the developmental courses, I feel that in the testing section we try to explain to them why they're taking the test and the reason we're placing them in these courses is so that they'll be successful in their upper courses. I think that is something that developmental courses should be explained by the instructor to reiterate what we try and tell them, which is that they evidently don't have the knowledge to go into a higher level and if you took the course you wouldn't pass it. We try to explain this to them, even though I know it's hard. Students say 'I've had that in high school.' I say, yes but a college level course is different than a high school level course. It's more detailed, you have to know more. And the students usually are pretty good about it; and some of them of course never even ask about it.

They're shy, they're scared, we have a lot of students that are really scared. They're scared that they will do bad because they hadn't been to school in along time and they forgot everything. But, we try to tell them that it's okay that you have forgotten all

those things. I took one of those tests too, and I had calculus in college but I placed at the bottom because I hadn't had algebra in 30 years, and that makes them feel better. You just try to make them feel better, but in my opinion those instructors for those classes should, at the beginning, when they're going over the syllabus, explain to them why they're there and the reason why they need to be there."

"I think at that level, well for some they don't even have a major, but for some of them they do, but I think it's part of the age-old conflict between academics and hands-on; the integration of the head and the hands. I think that's part of the problem in the community colleges. But for a lot of people in developmental courses, and particularly developmental math – for most people that's the number one developmental course – they have not been successful before.

They have a mental block; when they get here and the solution would be to go ahead and get them into something they're interested in. If they're going to go into aircraft maintenance, let's teach them math while they're tightening bolts and things. If they're going to be working in turf equipment, let's teach them the math as it relates to thicknesses of blades and the percentage of this blade that's going to be off the grass. There's math in everything, and the more integrated we make those programs the more successful they're going to be."

"And maybe that's where we could ask them, if you quit attending, why. Did you have a good mentoring relationship with a faculty member in your major? Especially students

who come in and go into developmental education. They get lost and I want to make sure that if their goal is criminal justice, at some point, I don't care if they're doing 031 math and 031 English and reading, they need to be in the pipeline talking with somebody in criminal justice to keep them interested and let them see light at the end of the tunnel."

"One of the things we could do to engage those kinds of students, and those students are typically the ones that show up in developmental courses. But what we need to do in developmental courses is figure out a way to put content-specific instruction within developmental ed.

For example, if somebody wants to major in respiratory therapy and they test at low levels of math and English, they can quickly lose sight of their goal if all they do for two or three semesters is take math and English courses. Because they're interested in respiratory therapy, they're going to become disenchanted and leave. There ought to be a way to mix some respiratory therapy modules, workshops, or something within the semesters that they're taking math and English. That would be a way to engage those students, keep them interested, keep them focused on what their goal is and improve retention.

You see that everywhere. Students that haven't reached that certain achievement level don't see the relevancy of general education, and many of them never will but you can probably hook some of them by figuring out a way to put some of that content in there. But some of the students can't see the forest for the trees, they're the very students that say, why should I have to learn how to write correctly. Someone like that just really

doesn't get it and all you can do is chip away at them. The majority of them I think you can do something with.

Let's take respiratory therapy as an example, we could develop a pre-respiratory therapy course and we could put in that course material to help the student understand why reading, English and math are important. And you could have that course as one that they need to pass in order to get into the respiratory program, and then you would be accomplishing exactly what you described. Make it a rigorous course so they've got to really kind of work it to pass it, but maybe that's a way to get that light bulb to turn on in their mind. I remember a couple years ago, at a conference and the speaker was talking about remedial education and about how you need to mix the contents specific, and he's exactly right. He talked about that's how you hook them, and I think he's got a book that develops that concept, so that's important."

"I think when you go there, and you hear somebody say, I've been here two years and I've never seen any of my major courses, you're inviting them to drop out. Maybe that's why I'm still asking why can't we come up with something that's unique in the sense that might get them motivated to understand that wherever you are in this world, you aren't going to be advancing unless you get some foundation under you."

Goal Orientation

"We've got a placement and career assessment office, and if the students knew about that they could sit down with an expert and take a series of inventory and survey tests that would suggest to the student areas that they might be interested in and give them more

information to make an informed choice about what they want to do, what is their goal in life, and what they might want to make a living doing. Those kinds of services are available but the students got to know about them.”

“Student services needs to advertise that more. We need to have counselors out there doing seminars, offering lunch forums where people can stop by and pick up information. That’s something that perhaps I can help encourage, but it needs to happen but we don’t do it enough. ... Goal-orientation, that’s a skill that I think we’re responsible for teaching and coaching. It gets back to the social and academic integration; you got to have both to be successful.

Many of our students are just treading water waiting for someone to help them make that decision, point the direction. I do hope that we’re able to gather some good statistics from this on-line orientation program and that we do something with it. That we just don’t run the numbers and do a couple of follow-ups and assessments. I really want this to grow into a program that will mean something to the students, and maybe that could be the central office that they all migrate back to when they run into these problems, because our counselors are dispersed so many different places on campus. There’s no central place to go when they have these problems, so maybe this orientation office will help.”

“Real College”

For most of the administrators, the student view of a “real college” elicited little more than a gesture of acquiescent. Two, however, made specific comments.

“ ‘I’m just going here until I can go to a real college.’ I’ve heard this before. I think some students think SCC is just another extension of high school, and I don’t know that some of them understand accreditation issues in terms of SCC being credited by SACS. And we don’t have some of the things, you know, we think about traditional college, we have to remember that the system is still relatively young. You think about traditional college, your liberal arts colleges, you tend to have activities that pull the students in, you tend to have more of a college spirit, and I think academically the reputation of the liberal arts colleges, at least the perception, is that it’s a stronger experience, more rewarding, and will lead to better career opportunities for the students. I think they so often think this is not college. But now, I will say this, most students once they get here, have, especially after they’ve been here for awhile when they start looking at job opportunities compared to some of their friends who went directly to some of the four year institutions feel good about their choice.”

“In doing my surveys for my paper, one is that we refer to ourselves as a school and so do students, instead of a college, which gives us a little bit of a problem with the real college. Well, a school is K-12, and so we perpetuate our own bad image by saying schools.

The other thing is, on my survey, the first question that I asked was ‘list as many colleges and universities in the State that you can think of.’ There’s 61... Fifty percent of my surveys, which includes people that work at SCC, did not list any community colleges. So, there in is the problem within us and without us.”

Student Interaction

“I keep going back to understanding the overall importance of student interaction, as well as helping the students understand the importance of building relationships on the college campus. We have to first, as an institution, understand, then we will convey the message to the students and then we need to, but, before we go too far, we have to create the environment for the students to be able to participate in such learning activities. But the way it is now, we don’t necessarily have the things in place, we don’t have many things in place that we should.”

“The institution needs to provide a better environment, in terms of the student center. The problem there is you got 400 high school kids that invade that student center every day for lunch and they’re so loud and boisterous that nobody wants to go over there. That’s killed out student center. Until the institution decides that it’s a priority and they want to provide a venue where students can go and study and watch TV, shoot pool or something, until the institution decides that that’s important you’re never going to solve that problem. So, that’s the way it is.”

“Absolutely, and part of that reason is because they’re commuters. This is a commuting college, most people don’t come and stay and so they don’t bond with each other.”

Campus Activities

“I think the charter high school is a wonderful concept, I’m glad it’s here, but when it’s right in the middle of your college function and gathering spaces, I mean I have students come to me all the time and they’re wanting out of classes and they don’t feel like they should have to pay for it. They say, ‘I didn’t sign up to come take a math class with a 15 year old’ or, ‘we’ve got a 16 year old in our English class that does nothing but laugh and giggle’ and, you know. A lot of the more mature students are very resistant to that, they don’t like it, and it’s hard to defend sometimes, and there have been some decisions to let people out of classes because they were that unhappy. But I think that as we grow and get more room, there’s a place for both populations on campus, but right now they’re butting heads and it’s kind of like turf issues, the younger kids are taking over and running them out of places like the student center. That space is going to always be an issue. I guess on any college campus, you never have enough.”

“They go home or go to work; that’s the normal average student in a community college because they have to work in order to survive.”

“Then none of them have ever gone to the student activities department, which is on the first floor of the student center, which is in the orientation.”

In reference to the student center: “The high school shouldn’t be allowed to be in there. We used to have a full-time student activities director and they put him up in administration and then they did not want to pay the money to fill the position. Because they don’t really see the importance to student activities. They have to have them because that’s a SAC’s requirement.

Instructors are the ones, if it weren’t for them, heading up organizations and things, then there probably wouldn’t be. But there are instructors that do that, and they don’t get paid for it when they do it.”

Researcher: What can you tell me about student activities at SCC?

“Minimal. It’s being run right now by a volunteer and we’ve been very lucky to have her for the past year. When our student activities director was promoted to a different position, the position was not back filled and basically, even when he was there full-time, we had very limited opportunities for students, because they think of us as a suitcase or commuter college. Nobody hangs around but you do have students asking for opportunities.

I know they did have some intramural leagues, but they were done more through city and county affiliations than intramural teams on campus. But I really think if the effort were made and the personnel was given the time to develop programs, that the students wanted, it would be taken advantage of.”

In reference activities other than Baptist Collegiate Ministries and about the plays that some students have mentioned: “But I don’t think there is anything.”

“The typical categories of students that we have. One is the student that is probably got a full-time job, may be married, may have a family, and trying to better themselves, and they don’t have time. They come to the college; they’re not interested in doing anything except their classes. But the other student is the young student probably, that did not get to go away to one of the major state universities or some where like that. They’re at home; they’re trying to get two years to maybe get into a four-year institution, or two years to get into a career. Those are the students who would probably love to see us have something, and I think that there are some trends that are developing across the nation in community colleges, even within our own system, that would get students involved, such as athletics.”

“This is another reason why we want student housing, because if we have student housing we feel like we’ll have more of a camaraderie, there’ll be more for people to do, they’ll be more interaction, they won’t be going away, they’ll be staying here and studying or whatever. I think that’s important.”

In reference to the use of the Student Center: “That’s cause the Charter (high school) students are there.”

“For years we had a program here where we had tennis, softball, two golf courses that opened up for our students for free, we had basketball in the First Denomination Church.”

In reference to the need for student activities: “We could do some surveys. I think the things you surround them with, other than the academic environment that they’re in, if they’re enjoying it would have a tendency to keep them here.”

“But again sports and student activities are very, very low priority for the president of this college, therefore, receive no funding, no attention, no support. You get what you pay for and right now we’re not paying for anything so therefore we’re not getting anything.”

“The importance of student activities is student development. Overall we have to provide opportunities for student learning, that’s why it’s important to create as many learning opportunities for the students as you can – organizations so students can have the opportunity to participate in. To experience working with other individuals, getting to know other individual’s strengths and weaknesses, what works and what doesn’t work.

While they’re on campus, participating in these programs, it doesn’t cost them as much if they make a mistake, they can make mistakes in terms of judgment that may not cost them as much. And it’s our job, as institutions of higher learning, to educate the individuals as they’re going through their out of class experiences as well as in class, and to make sure they have the skills and abilities that corporations or agencies are interested in seeing. They’re interested more than just the fact that you can learn or that you’re participating on the academic side, they want to know about your communication skills,

your leadership skills, your ability to work effectively with others, and they want to know that you can also follow and that you can deal with conflict.

And so we can provide opportunities for the students to learn to develop those skills and also to become a little more conscientious of their surroundings, because one of the challenges of college is that you must interact with the community, and all colleges have resources that can be used to help problems in the community, and so you can use your students. Not only can you educate them about some of the issues in the community, but also they can actually participate in helping to solve some of the problems, like working in nursing homes, helping to tutor kids, and so on so forth. So, you're developing a stronger individual when you do those things.

I think there's some of that at SCC. I don't think it's done to the extent that it needs to be done. I will say this, too, we're at a two-year college and according to a lot of our research, many of the jobs in the near future will require a two year degree more so than a four year degree. That being said, community colleges have to make sure that we are addressing some of the same issues that you normally have addressed at your liberal arts colleges. For years at community colleges, individuals would come in, get a specific skill, and go get a job.

Now, I think you're going to see more and more companies who are interested in the individuals not only having the specific skills, but they need to have some of the people skills, leadership skills, and other skills that allow them to be leaders in companies, as the company grows and they grow as well.

Currently, the student activities director is a part-time volunteer. I don't think we've paid as much attention as we should to that area here. We definitely need to take a closer look, but that's going to require, again, educating some of the individuals here about the importance of it.

I used to always like to cite Alexander Astin, who would always talk about student involvement. The more involved the student is in the institution, more likely they ought to be retained, and student activities are a way to get students involved.

I think the leadership first has to look at the overall and be knowledgeable and consider as we're making decisions about who we're going to have and what positions. They have to understand the importance of student activities and I don't know that that point has been made much lately. When you start talking about budget cuts, tight budgets, people think that the fun and games stuff is not necessary; we don't need to do that. Just go ahead and cut that area, because the impact is not as immediate as some other areas.

You've got older students, younger students, individuals who are new to the college experience, and some who are coming back to get another degree or certificate. You need to look at who your market is, who you're trying to pull in, and then program accordingly.

The bottom line is you just have to appreciate the skills that a person has to have to put together to do good programming. You have to do marketing. You have to also get input from the students. So you have to do an assessment, what the student's interests include and then develop your program accordingly.

Spring Fling, that's a good example of an event where you can draw people in from the full spectrum of students. But I think it's important to also have smaller events that appeal to some of your specific groups according to their race or ethnicity. It may be some programs that appeal to women more than men, and older students as opposed to young students."

"I still think it goes back to the knowledge of the importance of student activities. A few years ago, just to give you a perfect example of people not understanding the importance of students having their space and student activities, we were trying to get more students to come to the student center so we could have ongoing programs that would allow students to entertain themselves. So we started something called The Show Time in the student center where if a student wanted to come down and play his guitar and sing a country song, he could do that; if he wanted to rap, he could do that; whatever he or she decided they wanted to do as long as it didn't include something that was very offensive to the typical student.

I tell you we went from having about 2 or 3 students who hang out in the student center to having at every Wednesday, you could count at least 150 students, and it was constantly growing in the student center. What happened was, some would come for the activity on Wednesday and then, naturally, they'd start hanging around the student center more and more and more.

Well, we started getting complaints, because at that time we had some administrative offices in the same building, and they just thought it was ridiculous that

we'd have students there reading poetry on a microphone because they was too loud, is what we kept hearing. And we also had the activities, and like make your own video. Students loved it; we would have students lined up all day. But we'd get nothing but complaints. I got people calling my supervisor and we had to stop."

Priorities and Culture – The Key

Since every administrator that was interviewed stated that orientation could be done better at SCC, the question of why it is not done better is obvious. Although this question was not specifically asked, the answers were given in the content of the administrators' interviews.

Priorities

"I know two occasions here where we've spent a large sum of federal money to improve retention, but I don't know why we haven't been any more successful than what we have been, I can't answer that. Probably somebody didn't have the focus leadership put on it, maybe."

"It's extremely important because it's easier to retain a student than to get one."

Researcher: So you think the college puts maximum emphasis on retention?

"No, because they don't understand how to do it; well they do but they don't. This school is very noted for numbers. In the Fall we get paid from the State for the

number of students we have. So, numbers are important, and to our president that is the most important. How you get those numbers is your problem.

Therefore, it trickles down from level to level. Can you prove to me that having this course (college skills course) is going to retain students? Evidently no one has done that, even though they have been told and they have shown that yes those students that did take the course were retained. Nine out of ten of them stay that did take it at one time.

But they said the number of classes we had wasn't enough compared to the number of students we had. So they said how would that be valid because your statistics were not high enough, or you did not have enough students that took the course to prove that a retention effort helped save those students.

I think they know deep down that they know it does, but there are so many other priorities. Such as, they've got to hire the instructors to teach the regular academic courses. It's just been kind of interesting over the last 20 years that I've been here."

"If the money was there, I think they really would do retention programs. But it's according to where you set your priorities. Your academics, which it should be, your instructors, and of course getting students. Numbers; numbers, numbers, numbers, numbers. However you do it, you have to have your numbers. It doesn't matter if anything else is done, as long as you got your numbers and you got your instructors to teach them. So, I feel Student Services has been neglected."

“Do we do orientation as well as we should? Probably not, cause our philosophy here is, ‘pack ‘em in the front door and you don’t really concern yourself with how many are flying out the back door.’ Retention has never been a serious priority at the president’s level at this institution. It’s a priority further down in the organization, we’ve got several deans who are really, really looking at retention and they’re doing some innovative things, but it’s never been a president-level, high-strategic priority. So to the extent that retention is never the high priority of the institution, I would suggest that orientation is not going to be a high priority of the institution, because I see them as one and the same.”

Culture

“We have created a culture where if you don’t like the answer you just scream loud enough and hard enough until someone up the ladder hears you and then decisions are reversed, and I don’t necessarily think that’s a good learning experience for the student. It’s not going to work that way when they transfer to a four-year college; it’s not going to work that way when they hit the work force. ...

I think that the whole philosophy of the college has to change. They have to realize that everyone is a recruiter and everyone is responsible for retention. I think a lot of people think that getting a student, whoo hoo, as soon as you’ve got them registered you’ve got your numbers and it’s over.

It’s going to cost you more to recruit a student to replace that one when they don’t come back next semester. So I think we’ve got to do more in that area and realize that by better educating our students up front. You know any consumer, if they’ve researched

their product, is going to be happier with the choice they make, whether you're purchasing a car, a boat, motorcycles, whatever.

And, students are consumers now. We compete for business. And that student coming in, the more informed they are, the more they know about their curriculum, the better.

I think shadowing and career talks and things like that for students, before they commit to a major, is going to help with retention. It's got to go across all lines, not just student services, not just academia, we've got to hold hands and everybody's got to participate.

But there are limits, there are certain rules that you have to operate within, and in our culture here we've created a monster at times that if they scream loud enough and hard enough they'll get whatever change they want. But we've got to let these students realistically anticipate what a college experience is and you've got to follow rules, and there are things that are going to happen, and consequences of not going to classes. If we do a good job here, it's just going to prepare that person better for the work force or the next college experience.

It goes back to the student as a consumer. They want to be treated like a consumer until it comes to responsibility and things like that.

When they don't get that strong structure up front, those are the very same people I see two semesters later because the first semester they flunked everything or withdrew from everything, or made D's and then they're on probation in financial aid, and then they don't do any better the second go round and then they become ineligible. And then

they come and they want to be very angry and outraged that they can't get money again and they haven't even passed a class in two semesters. For many students that 's the first time it dawns on them the consequential part."

"That's just like anybody that gets to Dr. Barnes, because they don't like something or they don't like what kind of grade they got or they had to pay this amount of money, and he says, 'give it to them.' So, we don't have any backing, but this indicator, the on-line orientation, we have to do, and that's why we have orientation and it's a three year commitment, so at least we'll know we have it for three years."

General Climate

"Everybody in the area knows that SCC is the top community college in the state"

Researcher: Can you tell me what makes SCC the top community college?

"Our reputation, our technical programs, our college transfer programs, and the number of students. And we've got programs that other community colleges don't have."

"Dr. Barnes believes that no one should be turned away for any reason. That access and flexibility should be paramount to anything else, and really is not open to making students, forcing students to comply with certain guidelines and deadlines. Since the priority, above anything else, is growth and to help every student, that becomes the problem because he doesn't want to turn anyone away, so therefore, the staff realize that, the students know that, and so they all work the system, and he's afraid to do anything

different for fear that enrollment might go down. That's really the key issue there, fear to change anything because if you change it and enrollment goes down he claims that the price is too high to pay. So continue doing everything that's your doing, add to it but don't take anything away."

"We haven't had as many professionals who've been out in other institutions who come here to work, especially in our student affairs areas. A lot of the people who are here now, working with our students, are from this area."

"Now I'm just guessing, but I think some may perceive the number of students we're dealing with as such a large number that the perception is that we can't put together an orientation program like you'll see at some other institutions, but I know colleges twice as large as ours who have orientation program. So, again, and I don't know that the college recognizes overall the importance of a thorough orientation program and how it can, according to the research, impact student retention, which is one of our problems here."

"We need to do a better job in a lot of areas just hooking people up so that they feel comfortable coming back to someone for some guidance."

“It’s not a silver bullet. It’s an overall philosophy within the institution and a myriad of strategies that are put into place collectively with orientation being one of them. They all contribute to student success and therefore, student retention.”

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

OVERVIEW

This chapter begins with the analysis of the data presented in Chapter Four. The analysis follows the format established in Chapter Four, presenting affinities and sub-affinities from the student perspective while the administrators perspective includes analysis of both answers given to general questions from the individual interviews and to some of the issues raised by students during their interviews. The documentation is analyzed by affinity or source of the data. The analysis is presented in the numerical order of the research questions. After the analysis of the four perspectives, i.e. literature, students, administrators, and documentation, Research Question 5, the correspondence between the four perspectives, is addressed.

The second section of this chapter is a brief summary of the study as it impacts the six principles from the literature that have implications for new student orientation and programs in the community college. Following that are sections containing recommendations based on this study, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion of the study.

ANALYSIS

Research Question 1 - The Literature Perspective

What are the implications of persistence theory literature for student orientation?

Although it is not appropriate to generalize the results of this study, it does support the assumption that the persistence literature is valid for the community college. These theories indicate issues that should be addressed at each college in the manner appropriate to the unique situation at each college.

The implications of the literature are that community colleges must have orientation programs for students that:

1. Promote academic success.
2. Provide for informal interaction with the faculty.
3. Reduce interference from external variables including finances, time constraints imposed by work and family obligations.
4. Encourage social integration into the nonacademic aspects of the college culture to include friends, peer support, and college activities outside of the classroom.
5. Student advising, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services, is critical.
6. Orientation and retention programs must be employed early in the first semester of a student's higher education experience.

The literature indicates that the degree that these programs are provided to and used by students affects the retention of new students at colleges.

Research Question 2 - The Student Perspective

What are the expressed issues and needs of new community college students, and to what extent can student orientation programs meet those needs?

Why Students Say They Start College in the First Place:

Pragmatism

Most student reasons for starting college were a variation on the theme of obtaining or improving their employment position or qualifications. Many recognized the importance of higher education for obtaining good jobs. This was especially true of those older students who had been in the workforce for some time and those students who had observed the struggles of their parents or other relatives in the job market. These students were generally highly motivated to continue in college until they achieve their educational goal, although some clearly did not understand what that required.

The motivation to start higher education was the recognition that a higher education was essential to improving their life conditions through improved employment opportunity.

Idealism

Several students gave reasons to start college that were in idealistic terms. Although these could often be reduced to one of the other themes, the terminology used by the student suggested a separate theme. Two major motivations were:

1. The motivation to improve opportunity was not just self centered, but focused on improving opportunity for their family, or in the case of single parents it was expressed as ‘to better provide for my children.’
2. The basic motivation of job improvement for themselves, as stated in ‘The Practical,’ but expressed in more idealistic terms: e.g. a dream, providing for a future or future family (long term as opposed to short term goal), or ‘to get more out of life.’

Trouble from the Beginning

Since the reason a student starts a college education is indicative of the student’s underlying motivation and dedication to achieving a higher education, some reasons to begin the educational journey may forecast a short, or at least unfruitful, journey unless there is intervention. Two reasons to start college found in the study logically portend trouble in respect to retention.

For the Money

No student, either in the group or individual interviews, admitted to being in this category. However, it was discussed or implied as common knowledge by students. Specifically, some students enrolled to collect the financial assistance and used the amount over that paid directly to the institution as personal income. Financial assistance at SCC consisted not only of the federal programs that are common to all higher education institutions in the United States, but also assistance provided by the State from gaming proceeds, commonly referred to as ‘Lottery Money’ by the students. Students

stated that there were a number of students that enrolled, collected the assistance and then stopped coming to class. They stated that this process was repeated in more than one semester.

Although this may be a matter of fraud, it may not be an issue that is a matter of orientation programs. It does, however, impact the institution and students in the area of accessibility to a particular course section and student involvement in the class. Also, the fact that students frequently recite this situation implies that it is of significance to them.

Mom (or Dad) Said So

The issue here was the student who, by his/her perception, was enrolled at the institution solely because they were coerced by a parent. It is not surprising that they voiced a low motivation to persist. However this should not be confused with the student who was motivated to not disappoint a parent in terms of the parent's expectations for their child.

The Unexpected

The reasons to begin college had a wide variation on the primary themes of employment related and coercion. The motivations to start higher education in this category illustrate that the community college student is diverse in many aspects, to include their motivation for enrolling in the college. Administrators and faculty should not make the mistake of ignoring this diversity in the development of retention efforts.

High School's Relevance to Community College Students

Under-Prepared

That many community college students are academically under-prepared is well documented in the literature. The student interviews substantiated that position. However, the interviews evidenced other aspects of students' under-preparedness, as discussed in the areas below.

Comments that indicated that the students were under-prepared were heard more frequent from new students. It is possible that the attrition of under-prepared students made it more difficult to find them in the experienced student group.

The High School Mentality in the Wrong Place

Some students maintained a high school mindset even while in college, to the detriment of their satisfaction with their college experience and their academic performance. As examples:

1. One student repeatedly spoke about how she had 'taken' a developmental math course twice and had no idea why she was 'taking' it again. From her perspective, taking a course was sufficient. She did not understand the concept of learning specific skills before being advanced. From her perspective, since she was familiar with some of the information from her previous attempts at a developmental math course, she felt she should not have to take it again.
2. Several of the new students did not express an understanding of the importance of grades, 'I'm doing OK, passed two out of four courses.' There was no indication

- of the significance of the grade point average, the progressive nature of courses or the need to master skills for use in later courses.
3. Students did not understand how to study. Many stated that they had not studied during high school. The underlying tone was that they not only did not know how to study, but did not understand why it was important.
 4. Students often stated that they were used to being 'led by the hand' through work in high school and that college was an adjustment. Experienced students had adapted to the requirement to take the initiative in their studies. Many new students seemed surprised, but not necessarily displeased at the required responsibility. To many students, taking responsibility and initiative in their studies was an unexpected requirement. Students who seemed to have adapted or were doing well often stated that they preferred the 'mature' treatment in higher education versus high school.
 5. Many students commonly used the high school terms of 'teacher' and 'school' to refer to 'instructor' and 'college.'
 6. Many new students did not understand the expectations of higher education level work and in the absence of that understanding, viewed college in terms they knew, i.e. high school expectations.

Student Maturity, or the Absence Thereof

Experienced students often mentioned how much they had matured while in college and many older students noted the immaturity of the young students. There was a

similarity between this category and the general high school mentality category. In some instances the content of the interview evidenced the immaturity of the student. These were invariably the new students and they often made statements that indicated that they were not doing well academically. The tone was often that of whining and expecting constant special consideration to adapt course work to their individual situations. This should not to be confused with the student wanting an instructor to understand a special circumstance as discussed under the affinity What Makes a Good Instructor: As Seen by the Student.

Study – Why? How?

The lack of knowledge about how to study, much less the understanding of the importance of doing so, was either specifically stated by students or evidenced throughout the context of many of the interviews. This was especially true of the new students. It was clear that many students had not learned how to study in high school, or had been away from formal education for so long that they stated that as the reason for not knowing how to study.

The prevalence of not knowing study techniques indicates that this is a major issue to be addressed early in retention programs. It should be noted that while prevalent, there was a population that was confident of their study skills.

Age – The Issue That Is Not an Issue

Age, perceived a barrier to starting

Virtually all of the older students voiced an initial fear of starting college or fitting into college because of their age and being isolated in a student population of young students. Students recounted having much anxiety about this issue before they started classes.

The resolution of the age fear

The fear of being the isolated older student was quickly resolved after the start of classes when they saw that there was a significant older population that had not only started with them but had also gone before them and been successful. The resolution of the fear was complete when the older students perceived that traditional age students accepted them in the classroom.

Differences in Age Groups

The ability to work together in class does not mean that there was not significant differences in the perspectives of younger and older students. Many students did not perceive any problem between the age groups. However, some younger students thought that the older students slowed down the pace of class, often stating that the older students required more time to comprehend the ideas presented because they had been out of high school for so long. Some older students agreed with that view. Older students

sometimes were either frustrated or irritated by what they perceived as immaturity or ‘cutting up’ by some young students.

However, the most significant difference was that of the students’ perception or view of the world. The young student often was concerned with college, partying, friends, and work, although the work was not often for supporting themselves or others. The older students, including most of the single parents regardless of age, were concerned about work to support a family, childcare, care for other relatives, spousal relationships, and college. There are multiple views of this reality.

Benefits of Diversity of Age

As with any aspect of diversity, there were benefits from having both young and older students in the same classroom. Some younger students believed that the older, more experienced students helped them in their course work. Some younger students also stated that seeing the older students motivated them. This took two primary forms: ‘if an older student can do it so can I’ and ‘I do not want to be in their tough situation when I get older.’

Other Concerns and Fears of New Students: The Low Self Esteem of Students

Fear of Academic Failure

Fear of academic failure, or not being successful academically, was the concern or fear most frequently expressed by students and was often in the context of a barrier to starting college. For those students who were academically successful after beginning

college, the fear had usually abated by either success on a major examination or grades at the end of the first semester. The result in many of the successful students was significant level of confidence in their ability to succeed in college. Each student who voiced his/her story of academic success also expressed their emotional response as a feeling of success and consequently motivation to continue in college.

Conversely, most of those who were not academically successful were disheartened. The stories told by the interviewed students were consistent with persistence theory. Academic success is a major factor in persistence. It is significant that this study did not address the number of students who were not academically successful and were not retained.

Being in the wrong course of study or profession

Related to academic success was the concern for choosing the wrong course of study. Specifically, after spending years and money to become qualified to do something, students feared that they will not want to do it after they discovered what it is like on the job. The fear of making the wrong career choice was relatively common. Students often had no experience and little knowledge of the profession they were studying. This is especially true of the younger students.

Paying for College

In spite of substantial financial aid provided by the state from lottery proceeds, financial issues were a frequently stated concern. Many stated that without financial

support they would be unable enroll in higher education. This was especially true of students supporting themselves and those supporting families, including single parents. These students were making significant efforts and sacrifices to continue their education. However, the concern was most often stated in factual terms, not with hostility.

Access: The Issue that was Not Mentioned

Since all of the interviewees were currently enrolled in SCC, they obviously had access to higher education, even if some were under-prepared for it. However, no student ever mentioned access issues, past or present. The one student who touched on access stated that ‘it’s America, you can go to college.’

College vs. Work and Children

Work and Study

Most students felt that work interfered with their time to study, especially those who had financial issues. However, a few had no trouble working and studying. Experienced students had found ways to accommodate both work and college. Many had found jobs that allowed for flexibility or bosses who made scheduling exceptions for college issues, such as major examinations. The more inexperienced students often stated that work interfered with their time available to study, but later recounted their active social lives. In the interviews with experienced students, some recounted their survival of a ‘partying’ period when they started college before becoming serious about his/her studies. Also, some experienced students were clear that being a successful student while

being employed often required the student to adjust their priorities. A key seemed to be in the student setting priorities that enabled the student to be successful both at college and work, but the priority was invariably college.

Work conflicted with college, but many students facilitated both. Those successful students took actions that make college a priority. They took jobs that accommodate college; couples made life-style adjustments, et cetera. It is a matter of priorities. Students must be convinced that higher education is a priority and worth the sacrifice that is required.

The students substantiated the literature; work is an environmental or external issue that impacts retention. Students also established that work and college are not mutually exclusive, if the student finds methods that are suitable to their situation.

Using the Course Scheduling

One student made it clear that multiple course scheduling options facilitated being a student while being employed. However, another student stated that classes scheduled at 4:30 or 5:00 pm were not feasible for working students who commonly work until 5:30 or 6:00 pm.

Children and Study

Families in general, but especially children, were another major conflict with being a successful student. Students found childcare the conflict is not limited to childcare. It involved all the tasks associated with parenting. Further, childcare plans

were interrupted, and consequently the parent's class attendance, when a sick child is not allowed attend the childcare facility during the child's illness. Consistent with other conflicts, experienced students had found accommodations and overcome the problem.

Not limited to mothers.

Community college programs for facilitating the student relationships with their children often focus on the mothers. However, there appeared to be a population of student fathers dealing with conflicts of college versus maintaining relationships with their children, often based on limited visitation rights granted in divorce decrees. There may be value in an activity in the form of a support group for this population to facilitate resolution of this conflict. The one father in this study who discussed this issue had taken the only solution that had come to his mind. When he had visitation with his children, he totally disregarded college studies. This is not conducive to academic success, and hence, retention.

Children and the Guilt

A common issue for mothers, especially of young children, was the guilt felt in being away from the child to attend college. This was true for both single mothers and for those with spousal support in parenting and providing childcare. The implication was that the source of the guilt was the mother's placing her interests over what the mother viewed as the interest of the child, even though she believed college would eventually benefit the child through either as a role model or increased financial resources.

Other Distractions and the Student Social Life

Medical Issues

None of the students interviewed were in programs for accommodation of students with disabilities. However, two students mentioned chronic illnesses, which interfered with their studies. It is unknown whether they did not qualify for students with disability programs or were unaware of them. It does, however, illustrate that some student have medical problems that affect their college work are not identified by students with disability programs.

Student Social Life

Interspersed throughout the interviews, many of the new students talked about social lives that were entirely away from the college. Most did not talk about those activities interfering with college. When they talked about little time to study, the students impact on time available to study. Studying was not their priority.

Experienced students sometimes commented that partying had been a problem when they had started college, but they had ‘gotten over it’ and were applying themselves to their college work.

Student Activities

Student discussion of college activities indicated a recurring pattern. Many students stated that they were ‘too busy’ to participate in campus activities. Many then talked about their activities off campus, which evidenced large amounts of time spent

‘hanging out with friends,’ playing sports, watching television and other activities that did not directly contribute to college success. In this area, the other activities discussed by some students included dealing with families, often children of varying ages.

With few exceptions, students also mentioned a desire for more activities on campus. These ranged from sports, other recreational activities, academic related activities such as plays and discussions of movies, to professional or academic major clubs and activities.

Some variation on ‘there is nothing to do on campus’ was frequently voiced. This seemed to mean that there were either no activities that the student viewed as valuable to themselves either as recreation or learning activities; or, that they were unaware of the activities available.

With limited exceptions, students stated that they would make the time to participate in activities in which they were interested. However, there was a limited population that said they would not participate in any activities. This group consisted of those who are overwhelmed by the combination of college, family and work.

There was also a student population, most clearly represented by the retired military officer who was a student solely to obtain a professional certificate, which had their own social structure and no interest in student activities outside of the professional affiliations.

Students often stated that they did not have relationships with students in their classes because they did not see them often enough or have sufficient opportunity to talk with them.

Professional Clubs or Activities

Those students who participated in activities revolving around their major or intended professions were always enthusiastic and seemed eager for more similar activities. Also, they often stated that they enjoyed talking to students with common interests. Student gravitating to fellow students within majors was common and was clearly present in professional programs with those dealing with the student's major such as nursing, engineering, and psychology. The desire to be with students in their major was a recurring comment. Conversely, students (especially new students) in general courses described being isolated from their classmates, often commenting that they had little in common with them.

Summary

Students who were mature and had experience in college appeared to find a balance of activities, whether that involved college and college activities or activities outside of the college: work, family, friends, church, etc. In the absence of college activities that appeal to students, they will find recreational activities that do not promote success in college.

I Want to go to a Real College

The "Real College" concept was only stated overtly by a handful of students. But many more alluded to the belief that they were attending classes, not having a college experience. This concept may have significant impact on retention, as indicated by the

literature and the research indicating that student retention is impacted by the students' enculturation into the institution.

'Real college' was not an issue of academic standards. Although there were occasional student complaints about individual instructors, students felt that the academic work was sound and that the instructors treated them as college level students. In fact, there was more than one reference to the equivalence of community college academics to that at four-year institutions.

The issue as voiced by the students was the 'college experience.' This is not a simple concept that can be reduced just to campus activities, although it is clear college activities are a major part of the issue. Community college students learn what constitutes a 'real college' from a number of sources. Some have attended four-year institutions and most have friends that attend. Additionally, there is the knowledge, or myth, built up from high school advisors, relatives including parents, movies, television and news stories.

In addition to the campus activities, the perception of a 'real college' includes a multitude of clues. One of the major ones is the perception of the institution that has developed over the years. At SCC, the instructors were referred to as 'teachers' and the college as 'school.' It may be significant that these high school terms were in common use. Also, the blurring of high school and the college was evidenced in the data under the heading of High School Mentality. It appeared that the mental transition was not made by a significant number of students.

One student specifically cited the importance of the logo. Further, the general impression of many students was that the college marketed itself as an institution that provided classes and one that ‘works for you,’ not as a ‘college experience.’ Being visible in the community may not be adequate; the college must be visible in the light that it wants to reflect.

The ‘real college’ concept was not one of academics or of the perception of academic excellence. But it was one of college activities and all other aspects of a college experience, including the perception of the institution as a higher education experience rather than a just place to attend classes. This attitude was reflected by one student who had been a full time student at SCC for three years when he spoke of wanting to go to a four-year institution where there would be camaraderie built on being with the same people for a long time.

Instructors – A Key

Of all of the interview questions, ‘tell me about your instructors’ resulted in comments by every student and their tone made it clear that this was a significant issue. It was noted that most students commented on both the good and the bad aspects of instructors. No student interviewed was completely negative.

Importance

Numerous students told stories of relationships with faculty members, which were pivotal in the student’s persistence. These stories explained relationships which enabled

the students to overcome problems or convinced them of the importance of higher education.

What Makes a Good Instructor: As Seen by the Student

There were characteristics that students consistently voiced as desirable in an instructor. These traits appeared to be the foundation for the positive relationships that facilitate persistence. In no case was the instructor's depth of subject knowledge or publication record an issue for the student.

Perception that they Care; By Deed and by Word

Caring was not defined; it was felt and described. Students could tell by the way the instructor presents him/herself, the atmosphere of the classroom, by supportive behaviors, by the interaction between instructor and student. People sense when someone cares; students in the study were no different in this regard.

Communication and being available to students was a critical aspect. Students cited the publication, in both the syllabus and orally, by the instructor of their contact information. Students were quick to point out that there are those instructors who published the information, but do not act on it. This trait seemed to be based on the students' perception of whether the instructor valued them as students, was willing to listen to their views, and to exhibit understanding of their situation.

Challenge

Understanding did not mean that the instructor permitted the student to perform poorly or provide frequent concessions to a student or a class as a whole. Not one of the interviewed students even implied that they looked for an ‘easy’ instructor. Rather, many students said they wanted challenging academic work; they were in college to learn.

Not Boring – But Involved and Understanding

Students wanted instructors to be involved in the class and to understand the instructor’s impact on the student. Students do not want to be read to or superficially coaxed through a computer driven exercise. They focused on interaction with the instructor and, to a lesser degree, with each other.

Workforce Experience

In certain disciplines, especially technical fields, students valued the practical aspect provided by an instructor that had actually performed in the. In this situation, the perceived authority and credibility of both the instructor and the instruction, was enhanced by the instructor’s practical application of the subject in the workforce. There was a credibility that went beyond that provided by the academic experience of the instructor.

What Makes a Bad Instructor: As Seen by the Student

Simply expressed, a bad instructor was an instructor that did not exhibit the traits valued in a good instructor. They were not perceived to care about students, did not

communicate effectively, did not exhibit understanding of the situations in which students found themselves, or they did not involve the students in the class – and consequently in the subject material.

Lack of Classroom Discipline

Another trait cited by students that greatly detracted from the learning experience in the classroom was the instructor's failure to maintain discipline. Students believed that the responsibility for discipline in the classroom rested with the instructor.

Advising – Another Key

Students had strong feelings about advising, whether they felt positively or negatively about the quality of advising they had received. It was clear that both new and experienced students had relied heavily on the recommendations of advisors when the student first enrolled in SCC. Those who felt that they had been advised well had a positive view of advising and expressed a more positive view of their college experience.

Some students were not aware of why they were in a particular class. This is true for both those students in developmental classes and in curriculum courses that lead to their major, but are not directly related to that major. 'I took the test and this is what they said to take' and 'I told them what major I wanted and this is what I was told to take' were the essence of many student experiences.

Generally, students did not clearly separate the administrative advising function from advice derived from either the advising section or faculty.

Some Students do Not Understand Why They are Taking a Course

New students did not understand the academic system and often placed blind faith in the advising recommendations. Experienced students often had learned the requirements and were active participants in determining how they would proceed in college.

Developmental Classes – The Issue from the students' viewpoint

A minority of the students who were in developmental classes understood the value or reasons for taking developmental courses. These were the older, more mature students, even if they were new to higher education. However, most of the new students who were taking developmental courses did not understand why they were taking them and did not see the value in doing so. Further, they expressed major frustration with the delay in taking courses that they considered relevant to their majors or to their educational goals. This included young under-prepared students and older new students and returning students. Two major conclusions were relevant:

1. Advising staff and faculty members must explain the relevance and value of developmental courses beyond the 'because you have to' that was heard by many students.
2. All course instructors, not only developmental, must demonstrate the relevance of the course work to the students' educational and professional goals. This was clearly evidenced by a student who was angered by the waste of his time and money taking an English course that he viewed as having no value toward his

technical educational and professional goal. He could not understand the value of writing about a family relationship, but was excited about the prospect of researching and writing about a topic he considered relevant.

Both the frequency and the passion expressed on this topic, demonstrated the importance students place on this issue.

Why Students Say They Stay

Like the motivation to start college, the motivation for students persistent provided information relevant to the design of retention and orientation programs.

First the negative

Students stated that they were negatively influenced by friends who are not in college to take actions detrimental to the student's academic success, e.g. not studying because the friends want them to recreate with them on short notice.

Parents, Family and Friends

Many students stated that parents, family and friends are critical because of the support and encouragement they provided,, the example they serve as (to include the student's desire to not have the struggles their parent endures due to their education), and the positive desire to please a parent.

For Themselves

This is the loftier of the motivations directly impacting the student. Many students stated that the educational success is something they desire or makes them feel good about themselves.

Job Related

Like the reason to start college, students stated many variations of the theme to get a better job or a job with more security.

Faculty and College Academic Programs

As discussed under the impact of faculty, many students credited a faculty member as key to their persistence. Also, many recognized the essential part played by academic assistance programs such as tutoring.

Focus through Professional Help

One student cited professional counseling, external to the college, had helped her. She stated that she had lacked focus and had been a partier, rather than a serious student. She cited the counseling as a major factor in gaining focus, which led to her academic success, and her certainty that she would persist to graduation. No student cited counseling internal to SCC as being a major factor in their persistence.

Student Suggestions on Retention

Students provided many suggestions on retention which centered on the college demonstrating that it cared about the student persisting. Further, many students, especially the new and young students, often evidenced a lack of problem solving skills. The suggestions for support groups and mechanisms had significant merit for these students. Also, the teaching of problem solving skills appears to be a need in some format.

Clueless, In and About College

“Clueless” was often the appropriate word mentioned for the new student’s lack understanding of the community college environment and its systems. Although the environment was well known by administrators and faculty, new students clearly had either no idea or the wrong idea about the college environment. They did not know what to expect, what was expected of them, or how to act in the college environment. This was the underlying basis for their suggestions for orientation and retention.

Orientation Suggestions from Students

Following are suggestions made by students about what would have helped them, if they had had an orientation program. Most addressed specific issues that were of importance to them personally; not ideas that were intended to help other students.

What is Expected in College

When asked about their concerns or fears before starting college, the most frequently voiced fear, whether they were new students or experienced student reflecting back on their start of college, was that they did not know what to expect. The experienced students, for the most part, had learned what was expected. Most of the new students on the other hand were still trying to figure it out.

Expectations in General

As one student said, ‘I would have liked to know what was available to me before I started.’ Most students did not know what to expect of college in general before they

started and this was a cause of anxiety for them, not only before starting college, but as they tried to learn about college as they took classes.

People view the world in terms of their own experience. New students, especially those who are at-risk, view higher education in terms of what they know. This is true whether the new student is coming out of high school or out of an experience in a minimum wage, unskilled job. It is illogical to expect that students view college in the same perspective as an administrator or instructor. New students must be taught what to expect and allow their perspective to be reoriented to a new view of higher education.

Faculty Involvement: Expectations

Most students wanted to talk to faculty members or department heads to learn what was expected of them, especially about what to expect in the course work. They understood that each class had its own requirements, but they were anxious about the academic aspect of college. There was anxiety about what instructors would expect. This was related to the students' fear of academic failure.

Lessons from Students who had Been There

Students, both new and experienced, wanted advice from experienced students when they first started at SCC. They wanted to talk to students who had been in circumstances similar to themselves. Therefore, a diverse group of experienced students would be required to implement this suggestion, both traditional and non-traditional. Some students had help from friends who were already in attendance at SCC and felt that it was valuable.

Understanding Processes

New students did not understand the processes in place in the college. Therefore, many felt lost and were unable to be proactive in matters affecting their college career. Putting information in a catalog or one of many handouts was ineffective in this case. Many students did not read the materials and some who did, did not understand it. It is optimistic on the part of administrators that these same students will research processes on the website. No new student interviewed showed any understanding of how the actions fit together or what their long-range effects might be. Experienced students had learned how the processes work so they could use them.

Academic

New students have no prior experience with even the most basic aspects of the academic world of higher education. They do not know about degree requirements and plans, developmental courses, the effects of Grade Point Averages on graduation and transfer, or any other process that is needed for them to understand the college environment.

Administrative

New students have no prior experience with even the most basic aspects of the administrative world of higher education. This includes the first time they register, being dropped from class for too many absences, dropping classes at their initiative, and many others. New students have not been taught these processes. The experienced students have learned them while in college.

Tour of the College: Often Suggested in Conjunction with Other Items

An escorted tour of the campus was a frequent suggestion. New students, many of who were from small high schools, felt lost and were intimidated by the college campus. They had to find their way around campus while going through the strangeness of starting college and dealing with the problems associated with non-traditional students.

Other Suggestions

The degree to which new students do not know what to expect was illustrated by the student who said, “I never really thought about it. I just figured that’s the way it was and try to catch up...” This implies that students not only do not know what to expect in college, but that they are unaware of the potential benefits that can be gained from a well developed orientation program. Other specific student suggestions for new student orientation programs included:

2. Instruction on how to study
3. The admonition to not make presentations boring or “cheesy”
4. Instruction on how to deal with peer pressure and apply yourself as a student
5. Instruction on how to deal with barriers that interfere with college
6. Establishment of a position or office where students get help dealing with problems.

Unintended advice from Students to Administrators

Buried within the interviews were some items that students thought were important enough to mention that could be valuable advice to administrators in developing programs to orient and retain students. They included:

1. Understand the view of the non-traditional students and what they must deal with to be in college.
2. Being successful can build confidence.
3. Many students enjoy, and feel empowered, by helping others. As one student stated, helping others made the student feel “like I’m not as dumb as I think I am sometimes.”
4. Students want to feel comfortable in their environment, including college.
5. Providing options to the working student is critical.
6. Funding sources have significance beyond provision of funding. They can influence the motivation of students. Many students stated that they did not become serious students until they had a financial investment in their education.
7. College is an opportunity that should not be “blown.”
8. No student talked about having more information on-line or receiving another piece of paper. The voice was always in terms of ‘tell me’ or ‘show me.’

Concluding Comment: One to Remember

Many students were not certain that college was something they could, or wanted, to do when they started. They were “testing the waters” and their comfort level in the water

would determine if they persist. If the college wanted to retain such a student, it must ensure that the water is neither scalding nor freezing, as perceived by the student. Further, the college must help the student adjust to the temperature of the water.

New Versus Experienced Students

The fears and concerns before starting college were the same for both new and experienced students. However, experienced students had figured out what was expected of them, how to deal with the new problems that college presents and how to maneuver through the system of the community college. Experienced students are new students who have survived.

To a large extent, the tone of the experienced students was different from many of the new students. Several new students had an undertone of immaturity. However, experienced students had accepted responsibility for reaching their educational goals. This study did not determine whether that was a function of growth on the part of the individual student or whether the less mature or less capable student has dropped out before reaching the study's classification of 'experienced.' Specifically, experienced students had discovered that they were under-prepared for college and had learned to work through that to become academically successful.

Research Question 3 - The Administrators' Perspective

What are the community college administrators' perceptions of the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs?

The data was collected through individual interviews of seven administrators at Southern Community College. All administrators interviewed were either responsible for policy or execution of policy effecting student retention. In addition to the president of SCC, they included administrators in both the academic and student services divisions of SCC. The information is formatted around the specific questions asked of each administrator.

What do you see as the purpose of student orientation and the reception to the college during the first semester or year at college? What is its goal?

Administrators equated the purpose and the goal for orientation programs and, taken together, addressed many of the general issues discussed in the literature. As stated by the administrators, the purpose or goal of the student orientation was to:

1. Share information
 - a. On the resources available to the student to reach their educational goals.
 - b. To familiarize students with academic terms.
 - c. To provide information to the first generation student that they are not able to obtain from relatives who are not experienced in higher education.
 - d. To provide an introduction to higher education including admissions, counseling and financial issues.

- e. To create informed consumers and inform them of college policies.
2. Provide the student a positive experience and let them know that they made the right decision when they enrolled at the college.
3. Show them that the college cares about them.
4. Keep the students here.
5. Begin the process of students developing relationships that can help them to persist.
6. Fulfill a State performance indicator.

Also, during his explanation of the goal of orientation, one administrator stated that he knew the students cannot retain ‘all of this stuff that is thrown at them maybe in those two days.’ It is significant that the longest estimate given by any administrator for completion of the on-line orientation was fifteen minutes.

How do you orient your new students to your college and to the college experience?

And by “orient” I mean the whole reception to the college during the first semester or year at college?

During the period of this study, SCC transitioned to an on-line orientation. This was put into effect for the Fall 2004 registration, which began March 29, 2004. The administrator interviews were conducted in April 2004.

In Transition

Since 1955 SCC had used a Student Advising Registration Team, commonly referred to as the START Center. A member of the START, using a booklet as a guide, oriented each student individually.

With the growth of the student body to approximately 13,000 and the high number of students who registered in the three-week period immediately before the start of the semester, individual orientation sessions became unfeasible and were often not done.

Although according to one administrator the plan was originally to transition to a combination of on-line and group orientation, the plan at the time of the study was to use only an on-line orientation and to refine it based on evaluations.

The on-line orientation was accessed from the SCC homepage on the Internet. The established procedure was for the new student to complete the registration process to include application, testing, counseling, financial aid counseling and application, registration and payment of fees at a centralized registration center. During this process, new students were required to use a computer lab to view the on-line orientation, take a ten question multiple choice test, pass the test with a score of 70 percent or better, and print a completion certificate before completing registration.

The new orientation was developed using software to which SCC purchased the right to use and the material is based on the former individual orientation booklet. The new student moves through a series of orientation screens, which have links to specific

topics using screens from the SCC Internet pages. There is no sound associated with the orientation or linked pages.

On-line Orientations: Interactive?

One of the administrators favorably compared the effects of a semester long orientation/college skills class to those that of the on-line “interactive” system which was estimated to be ten to fifteen minutes in duration.

This time estimate was generous and assumed that the student actually read the orientation text and the linked pages, rather than just taking the test at the end of a long process of application, especially during peak registration periods. Further, the efficacy of the on-line orientation assumed that the student would be motivated to read in detail and widely search the links. This assumption was particularly unlikely for an at-risk student. However, an advantage of the on-line orientation is that it can be referred to later.

The on-line orientation was interactive in the sense that there were links from the orientation to other pages on SCC’s website that contained more detailed information. There was no sound, voice or music; there was no mechanism to ask questions; and the post-test did not require that each page be viewed, only that the student answer seven of ten multiple choice questions correctly.

Interaction in an academic sense implies an exercise in query and response; a questioning and expansion of issues not fully understood or where further details were desired by the student due to the particular interest.

Although one administrator stated that students must be spoken to because the students will not read written information handed to them, the on-line orientation could be viewed as an electronic “hand-out” versus the former written version. However, the effectiveness of the on-line orientation appears to be predicated that students will read the text of an on-line orientation to a much greater effect than a paper handout.

How well do you think your orientation and reception processes are doing in meeting your purpose and goals for the orientation?

Subjective Data

An administrator stated that he was not sure SCC was doing everything that should be done to orient students and improve retention. This comment was followed by an explanation that 2,500 students applied to SCC each year but did not enroll. SCC lost contact with them after they fail to enroll. The administrator argues that the college should make a better effort to enroll these students. This comment relates to recruitment, not orientation or retention.

Two administrators stated that the newly implemented on-line orientation had been well recieved by “a couple of focus groups.” There was no comment on the effectiveness in accomplishing the purposes stated by the administrators or the functions that the retention literature states must be accomplished to improve retention. Also, there was an implied assumption that students, especially new students, knew what they needed to know to be successful in college.

One administrator stated that he based evaluation of the effectiveness of the orientation program on the number of complaints about it that reached his office. Since few complaints had been received, he concluded that the system must be effective.

Objective Data

The college did not maintain, and therefore does not monitor, retention data at the levels where college wide decisions are made. This reinforced many administrator assertions that retention was not a college priority. Institutional data was neither timely nor detailed enough to permit evaluation and modification of retention programs.

How do you think retention can best be facilitated at your institution?

As a group the administrators suggested a wide range of ideas for improving retention, many in agreement with the literature. Two of the administrators referred to the literature on retention in their answers. The ideas included the following.

1. Institute an Introduction to College course, which would provide a wide variety of information needed by new students, including study skills.
2. Use of the Datatel software system to track new students to provide proactive communication with them.
3. Use other software to improve communication with students.
4. Letters or phone calls by deans and department heads to students.
5. Use of faculty as student advisors.
6. Implement a mentoring program using faculty and volunteers from the community who are successful. The intent was to provide role models for students by

involving successful members of the community and college. Special interest would be directed at first generation college students. Mentors would model "... the soft skills, the people skills, the work ethics, and things that can only be shown to them from modeling."

7. Use experienced students to mentor new students. Ensure that the mentoring students are from similar circumstances, such as age and socio-economic status, as the students they are mentoring.

8. Not becoming overly dependent on technology and preserving personal contact with students. As one administrator pointed out, "You know, they're not going to read."

9. Orientations for parents to educate them on relevant aspects of higher education; specifically targeting the parents of first generation students.

10. Recognize that there are things the college does not address in orientation and incorporate them.

11. Get the faculty and staff involved in orientation to facilitate students developing a relationship with someone they can go to for advice and increase the student's probability of persisting.

12. Increase the student use of resources to improve the probability of academic success.

13. Placing the responsibility for retention efforts on the department heads.

14. Provide good customer service; "be nice to people."

Two other statements were valuable in development of retention programs:

1. “We probably need to have a closer relationship with the students, and I’m not exactly sure how we do that.”
2. “There is no one “silver bullet,’ many actions add up to improve retention.”

Registration’s Direct Effects

SCC had an open registration period in which any student could register at any time. Some administrators stated that a large volume of students historically registered during the last three weeks before the semester starts. This resulted in an overloading of the system and the previous individual orientation system was not able to handle the volume, resulting in many students starting college without the benefit of orientation. In fact, none of the 32 students interviewed for this study remembered having any orientation. One administrator illustrated the overloaded period at registration as a period that generated thoughts of ending the process with the comment, “would you like fries with that,” in reference to the phrase used at the end of every order at popular fast food restaurant. Recommendations for correction of this situation included a more structured process and incentives for early registration

Mandatory or Voluntary Orientation

Of the seven administrators interviewed, five favored mandatory orientation or an Introduction to College course for new students. Another administrator suggested offering the course but not requiring it.

I have the issues and concerns of your new students as they expressed them in the interviews and, if you would like to, I would like to share the key ones with you and get your reaction to them?

Student Expectations

One administrator stated that he or she “would think they (students) couldn’t have gotten through the system without being told.” Another said that all of the resources available to the student were contained in the on-line orientation; they just had to go back and look at the details.

Most administrators understood the confusion of the students and viewed new student orientation as a step in informing students concerning what to expect and what was expected of them. They recognized that many students had not been in an environment in which they could learn expectations prior to initiating their community college experience, acknowledging that they could be overloaded with information and that the information must be provided through a variety of sources. It is significant that one administrator stated that he or she identified with this situation based on their undergraduate experience.

Study Skills

Administrators recognized that many SCC students did not possess study skills. Several based this on their own experience of learning these skills after beginning higher education. The lack of study skills was recognized as a major problem to academic success, student discouragement, and increased attrition. This was recognized as especially true for developmental students.

Most administrators saw a study skills course as critical to resolving this issue and would have required it for certain categories of students. One stated that such a recommendation had been made previously, but not implemented.

Developmental Course Students

An administrator stated that the personnel in the testing section of the student services division explained to tested students why they were being placed in a developmental course but that instructors of developmental courses needed to reinforce this explanation and explain the value of the developmental course.

Given other comments concerning the flow of registration during the three weeks preceding the semester and how that negated an effective discussion with students in other sections of student services, it is possible that the testing section has a similar problem. This brought into question the amount of time available for testing personnel to explain the implications of test results.

Most of the administrators commented on the importance of including material relevant to the student's major while the student is still taking their developmental level

courses. They proposed to do this by either adding preparatory courses in major fields or by including relevant course material in developmental courses.

Goal Orientation

Two administrators stated that SCC had the ability in student services to assist the student in determining a career goal or with counseling services, depending on the needs of the students. Further, they stated that these services needed to be better known to the students and one suggested that student services staff needed to be proactive in this area with events such as seminars and lunchtime forums.

“Real College”

Perhaps the most informative part of the interview responses to the student comments concerning wanting to attend a ‘real college’ rather than SCC was what was not said. None of the administrators evidenced any surprise at the student comment and most appeared to accept it as common knowledge. One administrator stated that he or she believed that many students viewed their attendance at SCC “an extension of high school” and referred to the absence of student activities. Another administrator referred to a survey done for work in a course in which she was enrolled. The survey cited the common use of the term “school” in reference to institutions within the state’s system. Further, that none of the persons surveyed, including employees of SCC, listed any community college as ‘a college or university in the state.’ This information may give insight as to why students come to the college with a high school mentality.

Student Interaction

One administrator explained the lack of student interaction as a function of a commuter student population, but did not comment on efforts to provide opportunities for interaction. The two other administrators who commented stated the importance of students interaction and the building of relationships, and that the college needed to provide more opportunities and a better environment for fostering student interaction.

Campus Activities

The administrators knew that the large numbers of commuter students and nontraditional students increased the difficulty of having students participate in campus activities. One stressed this, implying that it was the reason for the limitation of activities at SCC. However, the same respondent later stressed the importance of campus wide events at branch campuses, which also had large numbers of commuting students.

The administrators supported the charter high school on campus but were well aware that the space utilization at the time of the study adversely impacts student activities for the community college students. The student center was used for providing lunch for the charter high school students. This made use of eating facilities difficult for college students, and generated a great amount of noise. This reduced the center's viability as a student center for activities and interaction.

Activity and interaction was described as being further limited by the absence of games and recreational activities other than television and couches. One administrator recounted that at one time a student talent show activity was attended by a growing

number of students. However, complaints about the noise from administrative staff in the building resulted in the termination of this activity.

Some administrators talked about the events and activities that existed at SCC that were well received by the students. Most administrators thought that activities should be expanded. Also, one administrator stressed that in addition to college wide activities, activities should be held that targeted specific demographic groups.

Activities based on a profession or major course of study appeared to be of significant interest to the students and benefit them. Virtually all students stated that one reason they started college was to improve their job or professional situation. This was consistent whether the students were starting soon after high school, later in life, or wanting a new direction. Many students stated that they were predisposed to a professional area and were more inclined to attend such an activity. Further, students consistently complained that they were not taking courses in their majors early enough in their studies. This was especially true of those taking developmental work. Professional activities could bridge that gap and provide incentive to students to persevere through developmental course work.

Also to be considered is that many students expressed concern that they may be pursuing a course of study or profession that they 'may not like' when they are later working in that area. Student activities that were based on majors or professional areas could provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with a profession is about before becoming committed to it.

Students also stated that they felt an affinity towards students and instructors in their majors. However, early in their college experience, students did not have an opportunity to meet and interact with them. Student activities could provide an opportunity to do so. Interaction with like minded students and instructors would have two other primary retention related benefits: (1) Students would meet and form relationships with students who could help in both their major and non-major classes and (2) Building relationships with instructors outside of the classroom, is a key in student retention.

Priorities and Culture – The Key

Together the administrators voiced belief that new student orientation programs had significant purpose, many contributing to the success of students. Further, they had a long list of ideas for improving retention at their college. However, since persistence was not measured at decision making level of the college, the impact and utility of the programs that existed could not be measured. Also, the list of retention measures suggested by the administrators had not been implemented.

Although orientation and retention were important to several of the administrators, they stated that the failure to implement better orientation and programs for new students is due to the lack of priority placed on such programs at SCC. This resulted in limited college wide effort in the area of retention.

Research Question 4 – Key Issues from the Documentation

What are the importance, role, and function of new student orientation programs as evidenced by program documentation?

The documentation was largely in agreement with the information stated by the administrators.

Individual Orientation

There was an individual orientation process until the implementation of the on-line orientation. . If the individual orientation was done well the student will have had a personal interaction with a staff member. However, there is no information to dispute the statement by administrators that the process was well intended but not always done with enough time to ensure student understanding.

During the individual orientation was accompanied by a handout of a booklet. The topics in this booklet included some that facilitated student academic success (one page of Strategies for Success and two pages dealing with advising), most of the material dealt with the administrative aspects of enrollment and continued enrollment. Although this is valuable information that may answer part of the students' what to expect questions, the booklet is more of a introduction to college enrollment administration than a thorough orientation targeting issues the literature states would improve retention

On-line Orientation

The on-line orientation largely involved moving of the information from the “Your Keys to Success” booklet into an on-line format. The advantage was that the student became aware of the college’s website content through the links from the

orientation website, if the student pursued the proper links. The on-line orientation provided no more topics than does the booklet. Further, it neither required nor facilitated personal contact with fellow students, faculty or staff.

The on-line orientation concept has merit in its accessibility, minimal demands on students' time, and the limited resources and effort required to establish, maintain and deliver such a program. However, the questions of the efficacy of on-line orientation should be considered. In a community college environment in which there are high percentages of at-risk students, including first generation and academically underprepared students, it is unreasonable to assume (1) that these students will gain all of the information they need to be successful college students from a brief on-line orientation which has no sensory input other than visual and (2) that students will voluntarily further research the information to which they have been introduced.

Documentation Summary of Analysis

The documentation indicated that the on-line orientation was developed largely by student services personnel. There was limited input from academic affairs staff.. The content is an on-line format of the previous student orientation guide booklet. It provided valuable, but minimal information focused to a large extent on informing the student about student service functions with a brief introduction to academic resources and advising functions. It did provide information on financial assistance. And, if the students took the initiative, they could gain information on coping with other external variables which impact retention. However, the orientation had little direct impact on

these external variables. No interaction with students, faculty or staff was required or facilitated.

Research Question 5. What is the correspondence among administrator perceptions of orientation programs, the characteristics of the programs themselves, research implications for orientation programs, and the expressed issues and needs of students?

The answer to research question 5 is the analysis of a pair-wise comparison of the findings for the first four research questions. This comparison shows remarkable agreement and disagreement within the pairs.

A summary of this pair wise comparison is presented in tabulated form in Table 5.1 to facilitate the reading of the narrative analysis for research question 5.

	Students	Administrators	Programs
Literature	Correspond	Knowledge Corresponds Action Does Not	Non-Correspondent
Students	X	Knowledge Corresponds Action Does Not	Non-Correspondent
Administrators	X	X	Depends on Who Is Asked

Figure 5.1 Summary of Correspondence Between the Literature, Student Perceptions, Administrator Perceptions and Orientation Programs

The Literature and the Students

The student issues and needs corresponded to the literature to a great extent. Students wanted to know what to expect as they started in the college experience and had a great concern about their ability to achieve academic success. They also reported interference with their studies from external variables including financial problems, employment and family obligations. Students wanted help resolving these issues so they could pursue their studies. In spite of their other activities, they indicated that they were interested in college activities, but only those that interested them. Most often recounted were stories that illustrated the importance of faculty to the community college student, and the damage that a bad faculty member can inflict on a student's desire to persist. The interviewed students left no doubt that a relationship with a faculty member could be a decisive factor in their retention. All of these issues are in agreement with the literature on retention based on studies in four-year institutions.

The Literature and the Administrators

The administrators' knowledge of orientation and retention, if taken as a group, showed significant correspondence with the literature. However, their actions showed little correspondence with the literature.

As individuals, the administrators evidenced a wide variation in the level of their knowledge, or belief in, the literature. Most had significant knowledge of the actions suggested by the literature. A few had little knowledge such as opining that to retention is only a matter of customer service.

However, taken as a whole, the administrators had solid ideas that met virtually every aspect of the literature's precepts for orientation and programs for new students to facilitate their persistence.

The Literature and the Programs

The literature and the programs do not correspond to any significant degree. Although the newly implemented on-line orientation was mandatory for new students and provided valuable information as a basic introduction to some aspects of college, it left depth of understanding to the initiative of the student to seek out the information beyond the program. Further, although there were academic assistance programs available in the form of tutoring and labs, there were no programs that followed the orientation to pursue retention issues as advocated by the literature. Also, the orientation neither provides nor facilitates any opportunity for personal interaction with fellow students, faculty, or staff of the college.

Students and the Administrators

The administrators' knowledge of retention practices, when aggregated to the group interviewed, showed significant congruence with the students' perspective. However, that knowledge was general and lacks the specifics provided by the students during their interviews. This appears to be so because the administrators based their perspective on the literature or long term observation of community college students without having queried the students in detail about persistence issues.

However, the actions of the administrators were not congruent with the needs students' expressed in their interviews.

Students and the Programs

The correspondence between the orientation and retention programs for new students at SCC and the expressed issues and needs of students was slight. Although the new on-line orientation provided the students some information on what to expect in the college environment, its scope was limited. Although financial aid issues are included in the process, no other external variable was directly addressed. Additional programs are limited in the areas of academic success, student activities and student facilities. Interaction between faculty and students and student to student was largely left to the initiative of the faculty member or the student. This was in direct contrast to the issues and needs expressed by students.

Administrators and the Programs

Although it would be logical to assume that the programs would correspond to the administrators' perceptions since they implemented them, this was not the case. This was true on multiple levels:

1. The administrators collectively had a better understanding of program needs (based on the literature and experience with students) than the programs in place evidenced.

2. The administrators seemed to believe that the newly implemented orientation is a much greater benefit than the needs expressed by the students would indicate. It could be considered a good first step, but far from adequate programming.
3. The administrators shared neither a common level of knowledge of retention programs, nor a uniform belief in the value or efficacy of such programs. Therefore, orientation and retention programs were not an institutional priority.

SUMMARY

Although it is not appropriate to generalize this study, the retention theories developed based on studies in four-year institutions had a direct relationship with the issues voiced by students, and supported by administrators' interviews, in this community college. This supports the establishment of new student orientation programs and other retention programs that facilitate the key factors presented in the literature that directly improve retention:

1. Promote academic success.
2. Provide for informal interaction with the faculty.
3. Encourage social integration into the nonacademic aspects of the college culture including friends, peer support, and college activities outside of the classroom.
4. Reduce interference from external variables including finances, time constraints imposed by work and family obligations.

5. Implement student advising and counseling, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services.
6. Employ orientation and retention programs early in the first semester of a student's higher education experience.

Promote Academic Success

Community colleges have a high percentage of students who are underprepared or, as first generation college students, are without college-educated role models. The student interviews of both the new and experienced students illustrated that both groups have a void of knowledge when they entered SCC. This results in the students not knowing what to expect, and also not knowing what is expected of them in the new environment of higher education. Further, they do not know the higher education system. It is therefore, difficult for them to participate in a system they do not understand.

Along with being underprepared, the students lack the academic study skills necessary to be successful in higher education. If they are to have a reasonable chance at academic success and retention, they must learn these skills.

Provide for informal interaction with the faculty

The literature posits that a student's informal relationship with a faculty member outside of the classroom is the most powerful tool for retention. During interviews students recounted numerous stories that support this proposition. Sometimes the

instances cited were dramatic, often they were subtler, but the students consistently voiced the instrumental impact the student - faculty relationship had in their success.

The college must begin early to foster these relationships and make a continuous effort to do so throughout the student's tenure at the college. As previously stated, students expressed that one of their chief concerns was expectations. These included what college instructors were like and what they expected of the students. Students often suggested that faculty members participate in new student orientation. This would be a good opportunity to begin building student– faculty relationships.

Also high on the students' list of preferences were course or professionally related student activities. Such activities were consistently cited as high priorities by students, often along with favorable comments about the instructor who was instrumental in conducting them. Such activities are valuable because they facilitate student – faculty relationships as well as relationships between students. They also address another fear cited by students: studying in the wrong major they provide the student an opportunity to learn about course material and professions to avoid selecting the wrong major or field.

It should be noted that the student interviews indicated that the favorable faculty – student relationship has a converse side to it. Poor relationships between faculty and students are highly negative. Students were quick to point out the bad instructors, citing with obvious distaste those instructors who did not provide challenging instruction, had poor classroom discipline, and were perceived by students as not caring about students.

Encourage social integration into the nonacademic aspects of the college culture to include friends, peer support, and college activities outside of the classroom.

Although some students steadfastly maintained that they did not have either interest or time for non-academic student activities, most stated a clear interest in a wide range of student activities. Others recounted how they were too busy with other activities outside of college, and then described not only work and family responsibilities but also their recreation. These same students would then talk about how they would like to have student activities that interested them.

Many students talked about wanting sports programs, some as participants and some as spectators. They also cited how four-year institutions had sports, other activities and logo recognition as unifying factors.

There is no doubt that non-traditional students have many demands on their time and that building a sense of community at a community college is more difficult than at a four year institution to which generations of family and friends have allegiance. However, both the traditional and non-traditional students in this study voiced an interest in student activities. The key similarity may be the students' common statement that they would participate in activities that appealed to them.

When asked what interested them, students replied with a wide range of areas. These included sports, professional or course based clubs and all types of recreational interests. However, the underlying theme was students wanted activities and would participate if interested or they saw value in them.

Reduce interference from external variables including finances, time constraints imposed by work and family obligations.

The interviews were clear that students were impacted by many external variables. The experienced students had been successful in overcoming them, often evidencing great tenacity and ingenuity. These were the students who had problem solving skills or assistance in meeting the demands the external variables placed on them. Many of the new students interviewed did not appear to know how to cope with these external issues, often stating that they needed a place to go for assistance. Problems cited were wide ranging but included financial issues other than financial aid, childcare, other family issues, and work related issues. Many students needed help from the college to resolve these problems and allow them to concentrate on their educational goals.

Student advising and counseling, both by faculty and advisors or counselors within student services, are critical.

Advising and counseling services are essential to the efficacy of retention programs. These services can facilitate academic success, interaction with faculty and staff, and social integration into the culture of the college, while reducing the impact of external variables on new students.

Students expressed a need for knowing their goals, learning what is expected, faculty and staff that care about them, and help in dealing with the stresses and issues from external variables. The delivery of advising and counseling services must be by competent and caring faculty and staff. Further, these services are designed to assist the

student in learning about themselves and their career goals, a key to academic success, and can be directed at study skills and the self-confidence required for academic success.

Advising and counseling also address students' social skills and other issues allowing them to better build relationships with their peers and integrate into the social aspects of the college. Student problems, including those arising from external variables, can be dealt with effectively through advising and counseling services. And problem solving, and coping skills can be taught to better equip the student to resolve future problems. To be effective, these services must be well planned, coordinated and integrated into other aspects of retention programs.

Orientation and retention programs must be employed quickly in the first semester of a student's higher education experience.

During interviews, students were clear that their anxiety and doubts began well before they set foot in the classroom and the literature documents that student attrition occurs quickly, mostly in the first six weeks of the first semester. Clearly, orientation and retention programs must start impacting students as soon as possible, preferably before the beginning of the semester, if they are to be effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and analysis of the five research questions, the following recommendations are made:

1. That student retention be a high priority for the college.

2. That comprehensive and coordinated new student orientation and retention programs be developed and implemented to facilitate the success of new students and their retention in college until they attain their educational goal. This orientation and retention program should be based on the implications of the literature and the perceived needs of local students.
3. Student orientation should be made mandatory for all new students with only minor exceptions, e.g. Students holding degrees that are enrolling in a limited number of hours for specific skill training.
4. Among the retention programs, a study skills course should be developed to address the academic skills, social interaction skills, and life skills required for new students to be academically successful. This course should be mandatory for new students, especially those requiring developmental instruction.
5. That the college develop a broad spectrum of student activities that addresses the issues voiced by the students. Specifically, this effort should include:
 - a. Seeking information from the students as to their needs, issues and interests.
 - b. Emphasize opportunities for student interaction with faculty members and fellow students.
 - c. Involve volunteer mentors from the community who can serve as role models of successful, college-educated professionals in fields of interest to students.

- d. Focus on student activities centered around both recreational and professional interests of students.
 - e. Include students in the development of effective marketing of the student activities program.
6. Dedicate ample facilities for the use of students for recreation, study, organized activities, and food service. Involve students in the decoration and equipping of the facility spaces and in the selection of food service.
 7. Create an office to assist students in dealing with the external variables that adversely affect their success in college.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the qualitative methodology of this study, generalization of these findings is not possible. However, further research into the impact of orientation and new student programs on student retention in community colleges is needed.

Specific areas of inquiry include:

1. Given the proliferation of technology, the increasing use of on-line orientation at colleges, and the growth of software companies that provide software packages for this purpose, the efficacy of such approaches should be investigated. Community colleges must know how to best employ these tools.
2. Since there is an apparent interest in student activities by non-traditional students, the types of activities that most appeal to these students should be explored. Further, the investigation should include methods to encourage non-traditional

student participation in student activities and the implications of such participation on student success and retention.

3. Since student interaction with faculty outside of the classroom is believed to be instrumental in student success and retention, a study of faculty perception and participation in these interactions would be of value.
4. Research on how to educate faculty on the importance of interaction with students and how to motivate faculty to be proactive in pursuing relationships with students should be carried out.
5. Further exploration is needed on how to apply the precepts of the retention literature in the community college setting and on the efficacy of specific aspects of the literature within the community college environment.

CONCLUSION

Retention, or attrition, is not the result of a single action by a college; it requires a holistic, systemic approach. The retention models described in the literature are supported by this study and appear to be applicable to the community college environment. One key factor is the implementation of an orientation system and new student programs that can be individualized based on student needs.

A student's identification as a member of an institution is critical to retention in many cases. This study indicates that this desire is present, at least to some degree, in the community college. By the nature of community colleges with the high percentage of nontraditional, under-prepared students who live off campus, the enculturation will be

challenging and may not be at the level of four-year institutions. However, there appears to be a significant student population that desires to participate in student activities. In addition to the socialization value of such activities, their academic value cannot be ignored.

Many students voiced the value of having support, someone to go to when problems arose, and the use of peers for improving understanding of course work. Properly structured activities also expose students to the practical application of their studies. This not only reduces one of their major fears, that of being in the wrong major, but also provides motivation to assist retention by providing the practical exposure to their chosen field while they are taking what to them often appears to be endless and unnecessary series of developmental courses. Perhaps the most valuable benefit of such activities, can be building of a relationships outside of the classroom with faculty members, club and event sponsors, and other students.

There were a number of the students interviewed who had survived incredible hardship and were attending college to try and improve their lives. These were the students who were non-traditional in multiple dimensions. These are represented by instances such as those who are not only under-prepared academically but are single mothers, poor, recently divorced and survivors of abuse. The determination evidenced by those that were interviewed was remarkable. With reasonable support, retention is feasible, understanding that the time to completion may be long. The key appeared to be that they were certain of the value of the higher education that they are pursuing.

It appears that an axiom from the counseling profession is applicable to student retention: ‘When the pain of leaving is less than the pain of staying, the individual will decide to leave’ and conversely, ‘when the pain of staying is less than the pain of leaving, the individual will decide to stay’ (Curd, 2004). Translated to terms of community college retention, the task of the college is to show the student that the ‘pain’ that must be endured to persist in college is less than the ‘pain’ that the student will encounter in the world if they do not have a higher education.

For these students especially, the college must provide an opportunity not only to enroll, but also to be successful. This means that there must be programs to deal with the needs of students, as the students perceive them.

An understanding of how the college is viewed by the new student, not an administrator or faculty member who has been successful in higher education, is essential. This study showed evidence that new community college students view the world of higher education through much different eyes than do faculty members and administrators. The new student is often “clueless” about the world of higher education and is often unprepared to enter the foreign world that is higher education.

The underlying recommendation is that colleges must take the advice of Robert Burns, a Scottish poet of the 1700s:

Oh wad some power the gifte gie us
To see oursel’s as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.

‘Oh would some power give us the small gift of seeing ourselves as others see us!

It would free us from many a blunder and foolish notion.’

Community colleges must learn to see themselves as others, specifically students, see them. Further, the college must act to improve the way it is perceived by students. There are in fact many views of reality, and the view of the student should be of paramount concern. Asking students how they see the college, and acting upon that view, would indeed ‘free us from many a blunder and foolish notion’ and facilitate programs that promote student retention.

If a community college wants to retain students, the administrators must not only study the literature on retention and attrition, they must learn to see every aspect of the college, academic and student services alike, as students see it. The key to retaining the student lies in the perception of the student, and in what the college does to shape that perception and to provide the tools the student needs to overcome the barriers to their retention.

This is the underlying value of the new student orientation program – it is the foundation of that perception and the tool to facilitate the student’s experience at the beginning of their community college experience, the most critical time period for retention.

APPENDIX A

Theory Implications for Orientations

- Promote academic success
- Reduce interference from external variables
- Encourage social & academic integration
 - Peer support
 - College activities outside of classroom
- Provide for informal interaction with faculty
- Clear goals of students
- Fit
- Social integration & social growth
 - Peer interactions
 - Social involvement
- Academic integration & academic growth
 - Classroom experiences
 - Faculty interactions
- Competing demands of family, work, community, finances
- Student involvement and effort
- Student satisfaction and growth
- Encouragement from significant others
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Financial aid

APPENDIX B

Questions for New Students

1. Why did you start college?
2. As a new student just starting your college experience, what can you tell me about your concerns, doubts, or fears you have about your college experience?
3. Tell me about your experience as a new student. How would you describe your first semester so far as a college student?
4. What can you tell me about your successful or enlightening experiences (Ah Ha moment) as a new student just starting your college experience?
5. What can you tell me about your contact and relationship with your fellow students so far during your first year?
6. What can you tell me about your contact and relationship with instructors during the semester?
7. Tell me about how you think you “fit” in college.
8. What can you tell me about activities outside of the classroom, specifically those at the college, and how they affect your college experience?
9. What can you tell me about activities outside of the classroom, specifically those outside or away from the college, and how they affect your college experience?
10. Most new students have a “transition” to college. I mean the adjustments that you made from what you did before starting college to what you are doing now. This could include any change in behavior in your mind, such as attitude or how you think or behave in situations. Please tell me about your transition to college.

11. Was there anything else the college could do to help you adjust or transition into college?
12. What can you tell me about any doubts or concerns you have about whether you will succeed, make it through, or stay in college until you reach your goal in college?
13. What, or what else, could the college do to improve your chances of completing your goal in college?
14. How committed to your educational goal were you when you started college and now?
15. Anyone else you know who might want to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

1. Why did you start college?
2. When you were a new student just starting your college experience, what can you tell me about your concerns, doubts, or fears you have about your college experience?
3. Tell me about your experience when you were a new student. How would you describe your experience with orientation and your first semester or year as a new college student?
4. What can you tell me about your successful or enlightening experiences as a new student just starting your college experience?
5. What can you tell me about your contact and relationship with your fellow students during that first year?
6. What can you tell me about your contact and relationship with instructors during that first year?
7. Tell me about how you think you “fit” in college.
8. What can you tell me about activities outside of the classroom, specifically those at the college, and how they affected your college experience?
9. What can you tell me about activities outside of the classroom, specifically those outside or away from the college, and how they affect your college experience?
10. How did your first year experiences help you to remain in college?
11. Why did you stay in college in spite of all the issues that have been in the way?

12. Do you have a feeling of being a part of the college? Did it play a role in you staying in college?
13. Most new students have a “transition” to college. I mean the adjustments that you made from what you did before starting college to what you are doing now. This could include any change in behavior in your mind, such as attitude or how you think or behave in situations. What can you tell me about your transition into college and anything the college has done to help?
14. Was there anything else the college could do to help you adjust or transition into college?
15. What, or what else, could the college do to improve your chances of completing your goal in college?
16. How committed to your educational goal were you when you started college and now?
17. Anyone else you know who might want to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

1. What do you see as the purpose of student orientation and the reception to the college during the first semester or year at college? What is its goal?
2. How do you orient your new students to your college and to the college experience? And by “orient” I mean the whole reception to the college during the first semester or year at college?
3. How well do you think your orientation and reception processes are doing in meeting your purpose and goals for the orientation?
4. How do you think retention can best be facilitated at your institution?
5. I have the issues and concerns of your new students as they expressed them in the interviews and, if you would like to, I would like to share the key ones with you and get your reaction to them?

APPENDIX E

STUDENT ISSUES TO ADDRESS WITH ADMINISTRATORS

1. In the area of Instruction and Instructor Interaction:
 - a. Generally students are pleased with the instruction and the willingness of instructors to interact and be responsive to students. However, those students who are not proactive in contact with instructors, largely those who have lower academic skills, do not have much, if any interaction with the instructor.
 - b. What should or can something be done to change that situation?
2. Transition to college for those new to the college environment:
 - a. Students often expressed that they do not know what is expected on them in the environment of higher education. Common themes appeared to be:
 - i. that they had to be responsible for themselves, they were not “lead by the hand” as they were in high school.
 - ii. The importance of attendance was not recognized.
 - iii. Many did not know the consequences of their actions, specifically poor grades.
 - iv. Many do not understand the range of student services available to them; although they were aware of the tutoring and SkyLab.
 - v. They often expressed that they were initially lost on campus and did not know how to get to classes.
 - vi. Many to not appear to understand academic system.

- b. What should or can something be done to change that situation?
- 3. Interaction between students appears to be:
 - a. Limited – Many just go to class and leave
 - b. Most do not study with classmates
 - c. Most do not study on campus, a few in the library
- 4. Very few students participate in any activities on campus
 - a. Baptist Collegiate Ministry has some participants
 - b. Many students do not know if anything is available
 - c. Many say they are busy but would participate if there was something that interested them
 - d. Many expressed an interest in sports
- 5. Student Center
 - a. Lightly used
 - b. “Nothing to do there”
 - c. Used as a High school lunchroom and do not want to be there
- 6. Several said that they want to go to a “real college.” When asked what they mean by “a real college” the responses did not deal with academics but the availability of “college activities.”
- 7. Goals
 - a. Those who know their goal appear dedicated to reaching it
 - b. Those who do not know what they want, appear less dedicated
 - c. Can anything be done by the college to facilitate goal determination

APPENDIX F

SPECIFIC DOCUMENTATION ISSUES

1. What does the documentation (policy and curriculum) state should be included in the orientation program?
 - a. What subjects/topics included?
 - b. What events are planned?
 - c. What is the length of the orientation?
 - d. What is the planned faculty involvement with students?
 - e. Who designed the program?
 - f. Who is responsible for oversight of the program?
 - g. Who instructs the students?
 - h. Which students are required to participate?
 - i. What percentage of the targeted population attends?
 - j. What are the quality control procedures for the program?
 - k. Is there any data on the success of the program?
2. What resources does the college use to support the orientation effort?
 - a. Budgeted support for the orientation programs.
 - b. Faculty and staff resources, as inferred from oversight, instruction assets, time and level of faculty and staff participation.
 - c. Any resources (personnel, material, or monetary) from sources external to the college.

3. Are aspects of persistence theory addressed in the orientation?
 - a. Are there elements of the program that are intended to promote academic success?
 - b. Are there elements of the program that are intended to reduce interference from external variables such as financial difficulties and time constraints imposed by work or family obligations?
 - c. Are there elements of the program that are intended to encourage social integration into the non-academic aspects of the college culture such as development of peer support and college activities outside of the classroom?
 - d. Are there elements of the program that are intended to provide for informal interaction with the faculty?

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